A WORD FOR MAJOR MITCHELL:

In his talk on Country Towns of N.S.W. Dr. Jeans suggested that, after producing a first-class town plan for East Maitland, Mitchell lost interest in town planning (having so many and such a variety of other interests to pursue) and thereafter merely provided, or allowed his subordinates to provide, endlessly-repeated gridiron plans.

But surely Wollongong was an exception. According to Alexander Stewart (whose account is reprinted in “Earliest Illawarra”) Mitchell planned Wollongong on the spot:

“Mr. Smith (had) made a promise that he would give a square block of land on the highest point in the township . . . for an Anglican Church . . . The church block had to be cut out of the township, and it was the laying out that caused Major Mitchell a good deal of mental anxiety. The block was to be reserved on the crown of Church Hill, and puzzle was how it was to be done and at the same time admit of a decent looking township being planned. Moreover, the church block was to be approached by streets on each of its four sides. I think this was an imperative condition. From my house on the green at the bottom of Crown Street there was a clear view, and from the green for several days—three or four—I watched Major Mitchell standing alone on the summit of Church Hill . . . He would stand there for hours together, with his glass and a book and pencil cogitating and pencilling . . . He had a man assisting him, but this man stood at a distance from him and only went to him when called. The man would not let anyone go near Major Mitchell when he was viewing and scratching his head on the top of the hill. At last, after he had stood there like a scarecrow for days and days, he drove in the corner pegs of the sections and said the township was laid out. Then he went back to Sydney, and a few days afterwards he sent down a surveyor who surveyed the allotments and pegged them out.”

And Wollongong’s main street as Mitchell visualised it—Market Street, with the market square at the lower end and the church on the hilltop closing off the vista to the west—would certainly have been something different from either the long straggle of upper Crown Street or the monotonously straight main streets, tailing off into the paddocks, of innumerable Australian country towns.

(But, to take another local instance, whoever planned Kiama provided the worst conceivable example of a gridiron plan applied with reckless indifference to the terrain, the contours and the potentialities of one of the most beautiful sites any town ever had).

PERSONAL:

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to our member Mr. Fred Healy, who is convalescing after an operation.

NEW MEMBERS:

We are pleased to welcome as new members Mrs. R. Weston (Dapto), Associate Professor Colin Kiernan (Mount Pleasant) and A.I.S. Employees’ Credit Union Ltd.