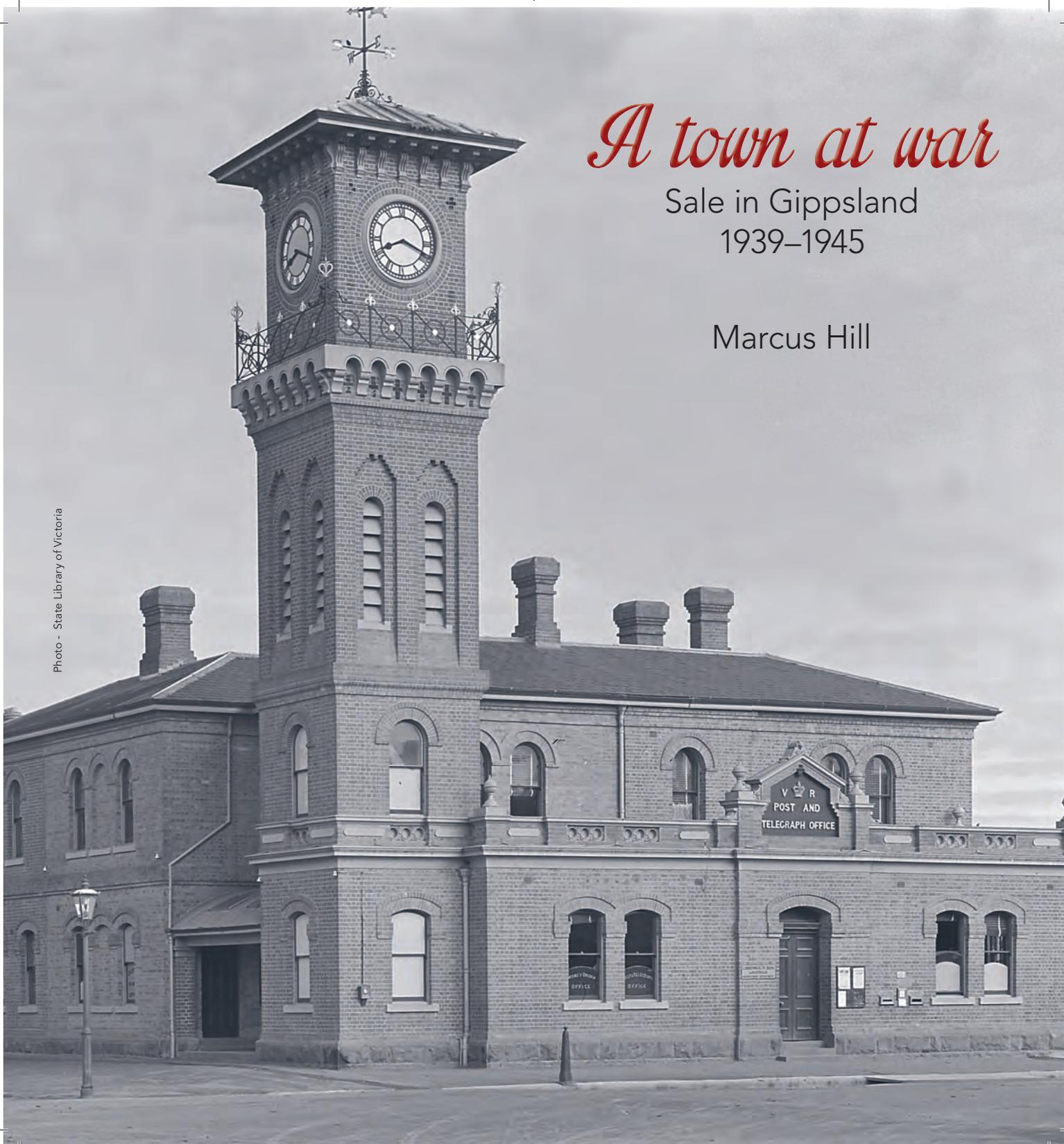


A town at war

Sale in Gippsland
1939–1945

Marcus Hill

Photo - State Library of Victoria



The wartime memories of a young child

The poems of an old man

At the age of eighty Marcus (Mark) Hill has published his first book which contains a collection of thirty poems about his childhood in wartime. It has taken a year to complete the project which also includes five heavily researched appendices that provide background to some of the poems. **A TOWN AT WAR, Sale in Gippsland, 1939-1945** is the title

How does an octogenarian get caught up in such a literary task? Ask Mark about the moment of decision and he will tell you that he can't quite remember it!

"I had a spell in hospital early last year and writing a few poems for patients around me filled my time. But then it just kept rolling along. Given that seventy years had passed, I was surprised how much I remembered about my childhood. The ideas for poems, and the poems themselves, just seemed to come from nowhere".

One of the poems, **Listen to the Stones**, which was inspired by engravings on headstones in Sale War Cemetery, was widely-used in recent ANZAC Day services.

Mark was only six years of age when he started gathering the memories that have now given rise to poems. He recalls his primary school teachers at St Mary's rehearsing evacuation drills that took excited students into nearby zig-zag trenches, his awe on seeing a captured German fighter put on show in Prestney's garage, and everyone's fright when a "new" (previously unheard) bomber roared low overhead late one night. Was it a Jap?

With RAAF bases at West Sale, East Sale and Bairnsdale, military aircraft were a constant distraction for young and old in Sale and surrounding areas. Many school children became expert "aircraft spotters". But not only were planes flying low overhead, wrecked planes were constantly being towed through the town.

The effect of the war on the civilian population is a constant theme in the book. What do you do when food and clothing are strictly rationed? What of the social life in the town when hundreds of young airmen want to dance the night away on Saturdays? And what use is a car when there is no fuel available? Fuel was so scarce that Sale's two bakers could only deliver bread to their zoned half of the town.

While **A Town at War** highlights the heroes who flew the aircraft overhead, Mark Hill points to heroes on the ground as well. In addition to the two Mayors of Sale during this period and the doctors and others who led the community, he places the editor of the Gippsland Times at the top of the list. "Stan Overend played a major part in lifting the spirits of the civilian population during those dark times. He kept readers informed despite the severe censorship constraints imposed by Canberra. To me he was a true patriot at a time when heroes and patriots were much in demand".

A TOWN AT WAR, Sale in Gippsland, 1939-1945

**Available by donation
(Suggest \$20 plus \$2 postage)
to the Early Arts Guild of Victoria.
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