PASSING AWAY

K. S. INGLIS

T HE INFANTILE PARALYSIS epidemic, near its peak as the year began, made more headlines than any other not because it was high on the list of killers but because it struck children, and did so when, for the first time in history, the death of a child was an uncommon event in countries such as Australia. More people than ever before were escaping or surviving illness in youth and early maturity to die as old men and women. In 1888 more than 10 per cent of babies died within a year of birth; in 1938 fewer than 4 per cent died. Only in New Zealand did a smaller proportion of white parents have to mourn children who did not reach their first birthday, and only in New Zealand and the Netherlands did surviving one-year-olds have a better chance of reaching old age. An average white baby born in Australia in 1888 had a life expectancy of 50 years; in 1938 the figure was 65 years. The figures for Aborigines were not known.

Of the 66 451 people whose deaths were recorded, most died in their own homes, but more and more died in hospital. In 1888 perhaps as many as nine of every ten deaths happened at home and only one in hospital. By 1938 deaths at home may have been down to six out of ten, with deaths in hospital approaching four out of ten. People saw the modern hospital as a place with skills and equipment able to control pain and save, or at least prolong, life. Many people, moreover, were less comfortable than their parents had been at the prospect of having a dead body in the house: the less people saw of death, the more uneasy it made them.

Six sorts of disease caused most of the deaths. Heart ailments accounted for 15 463, or one in five; cancer, 7929; pneumonia, 4402; kidney disease, 3899; disorders of vessels supplying blood to the brain, 3062; and tuberculosis, 2652. Poliomyelitis killed 159. The death rate from tuberculosis was falling and, for reasons experts disagreed about, the rates from heart disease and cancer were rising. The latter diseases tended to be afflictions of old people, who made up an increasing proportion of the population; among people under 60 there had been no increase since 1911 in mortality from these causes.

A young girl is carried away at Fort Macquarie by an ambulance officer. She is wearing pyjamas supplied by the USS Louisville after the launch, the Rodney, capsized.

Violence, either deliberate or accidental, caused about 7 per cent of deaths, including 81 people killed wilfully by others and two murderers executed by the state. The 27-year-old man hanged in Adelaide on 11 August was the first person put to death by the government of South Australia for nine years. He and the 65-year-old man hanged at Sydney's Long Bay gaol on 27 May had committed what were judged to be the most terrible of crimes: each had abducted a little girl, strangled her and put her body in a bag. 'For what I have done I am very sorry', the Sydney murderer said from the dock, 'I take turns as the result of war injuries'. Members of the Howard League of Penal Reform, who believed that capital punishment was wrong, petitioned the state government in vain to commute the sentence; and so in Adelaide did one clergyman and the murderer's wife.

Suicide was twice as common as homicide: a verdict of suicide was returned for 170 deaths, or about 11 for each 100 000 people. This rate was a little lower than that in the United States, about the same as the United Kingdom's and much higher than Ireland's. The Irish figure might suggest that Catholics were restrained by their church's definition of self-killing as a mortal sin, but the Catholics of France were twice as prone as the Protestants and Catholics of Australia to end their own lives.

More males than females died by homicide (52 to 29) and suicide (103 to 67). More were also victims of fatal accidents. Among causes of accidental death the one peculiar to women, failed abortion, was officially reported to have accounted

for 105 deaths, or 24 more than the total caused by homicide. Among all causes of violent death only snakes killed as many females (7) as males. More males died by accident mainly because men at work led riskier lives than women. Only males were crushed to death in mines, quarries and factories, and more men than women were drowned or killed by trains, trams and motor vehicles.

The motor vehicle was the most formidable killer unknown to Australians in 1888. It killed 1107 males and 284 females, more than one in three of all accidental deaths. Cars, trucks and motorcycles collided, ran off the road, hit pedestrians; they made headlines especially after holiday weekends. There were 41 deaths associated with water transport. On Sydney harbour nineteen people died when the launch *Rodney*, full of people saying farewell to an American warship in port for the sesquicentennial celebrations, capsized on Sunday 13 February. Aeroplane crashes killed 47 people, making 1938 the first year in which travel by air caused more deaths than travel by water. Near Melbourne on 25 October, eighteen people died when the *Kyeema*, a DC2 'airliner' of Australian National Airways, crashed in dense cloud. This was the worst disaster in the short history of Australian aviation. The papers carried stories of the chance which led some people to be on board and others not. Air travellers tended to be prominent men, and the *Kyeema*'s dead included five lawyers who had been working in Perth at a royal commission on national insurance, three heads of South Australian wineries, and Charles Hawker, member for the South Australian seat of Wakefield in the federal parliament, a former minister regarded by some as potential prime minister. He had survived terrible war wounds in 1917.

The workplace was a constant source of danger. Fatal accidents at AIS, Port Kembla, noted 'with regret' by members of the AIS board, numbered sixteen between December 1936 and November 1939.
AIS PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY

FUNERALS

A funeral was both a religious and a communal event. Clergymen were nearly always involved, but secular aspects of a person's identity were also remembered and mourned. Notable soldiers were buried with military honours. Policemen and firemen who died on duty were awarded ceremonies at which their comrades marched in uniform. 'State' funerals were given to prominent men deemed to have performed high official service: in Sydney Sir Philip Street, formerly lieutenant-governor and chief justice of New South Wales; in Melbourne John Barnes, a minister in the federal Labor government of 1929–32, whose procession halted for two minutes outside the Trades Hall. In Perth Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs, commander of the Fifth Division in 1916–18, was buried with both military and state honours. In Melbourne the service for Charles Hawker, two days after the crash of the *Kyeema*, was conducted by the Anglican chaplain of his old school, Geelong Grammar. His brother and cousins were chief mourners; colleagues from both sides of the federal parliament were pallbearers; a bugler sounded the Last Post, and a military burial service was read over the flag-draped coffin by a leader of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSL). That night the remains travelled by train home to South Australia and next day a memorial service was held in St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide.

When Elcon Myer, one of two Russian-born Jewish brothers who had created the Myer Emporium, died in Melbourne on 18 February, Rabbi Jacob Danglow conducted services at the family house in Toorak and at the Melbourne General Cemetery, and another service was held at the synagogue in St Kilda. The mourners at the burial on Sunday afternoon included nearly 2000 Myer employees, RSL representatives remembering a returned soldier, Prince Henry's Hospital officials paying respect to a member of the board, and fellow members of the Masonic Lodge who dropped their customary evergreen leaves into the

John Barnes' grave, Melbourne General Cemetery. Photograph by B. Rigby, 1984.

grave. In his graveside address the rabbi praised the dead man for his attachment to Jewish traditions, loyalty to the British Empire, and commitment to the golden rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, which he declared to be the basis of both the Jewish and the Christian religions.

At possibly the year's largest funeral, the 4000 people who followed the body of Dr John Barry, Catholic Bishop of Goulburn, to the Goulburn cemetery on 24 March included not only his own clergy and laity, the *Catholic Press* noted, but 'representatives of practically every section of the civic, commercial and sporting life of the city, and including the Vicar-General of the Anglican Diocese ...' Goulburn had a population of only 15 000 people. For private as well as eminent people, funerals in country towns, where everybody knew everybody, were likelier to draw members of different faiths than city funerals. Country Catholics, though forbidden to attend Protestant services, often waited outside and joined the procession on its way to the cemetery.

Funeral practices varied according to race, religion and taste. Wreaths normally accompanied a coffin on its journey to the cemetery, but some families requested 'No flowers'. Catholics but not Protestants dressed bodies in the brown garment of a religious order and were encouraged to visit cemeteries on All Souls' Day, 2 November. Catholics commonly held a vigil, or wake, during the night or nights between death and burial, the body laid out in a candle-lit front room, relatives and friends and neighbours and sometimes nuns visiting to keep company, to pray, to eat and drink. The wake was an Irish custom, and here as in the old land the drink was strong or soft according to whether or not the family heeded the priest's frown. More Catholic than Protestant women attended funerals, possibly because Anglo–Scottish Australians valued the repression of grief more highly than those of Irish origin. Peter Harrison, aged eighteen, was in wholly male company at the Anglican funeral in Sydney of his older brother: the women 'all stayed at home and wept on each other's shoulders'.

Protestant rituals, like Catholic, sometimes incorporated practices from a particular homeland. Near Angaston in South Australia, Lutheran employees of Hugo Gramp, killed in the crash of the *Kyeema*, stood before his house as the coffin passed, wearing by old German custom not only a black armband but a white rosebud. Orthodox Jewish families were expected to devote themselves to mourning for seven days and to recite the Kaddish, an ancient prayer, for another eleven months. Chinese, in some places still numerous enough to have their own temple in a cemetery, attracted curiosity by leaving food for the dead. Phyllis Uren, aged thirteen, watched the funeral in Darwin of an old Chinese woman whose relatives killed pigs and put the meat on the grave. The food disappeared, she noted, eaten by 'all the hobos round about'. Hindu funerals, though rare, made news. On 25 October the body of Harditta Singh, a farmer at Pirro in the Victorian Mallee, was put on a pyre constructed by seven other Hindus. 'Large quantities of wood were heaped over the coffin', reported the Melbourne *Argus* correspondent in Ouyen, 'and while the flames leapt high one of the Hindus read the last rites according to their faith. Later, portions of the ashes were gathered and thrown into a flowing stream'.

Burning bodies was among the practices of Aborigines, whose funeral customs were even more diverse than those of newcomers. The Ungarinyin people in the Kimberley district of Western Australia had one form of burial for little children, another for older children, women and old men, and a third for men in their prime. Dead infants were wrapped in bark, carried about for months by their mothers, then put in a rock-hole. All other corpses except those of strong men were buried, and their graves surrounded by a circle of stones. Fully initiated men who died

Elcon Baevski Myer's grave, Melbourne General Cemetery. Photograph by B. Rigby, 1984.

The grave of a Malay buried in the northern town of Broome, WA, in September. The food and drink were left there to help the departed spirit.
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRINTER

when not yet 'close-up dead' were exposed on a tree-platform until the flesh left the bones, which were then deposited in a cave. Aborigines mourned with an intensity known to few white Australians.

Among white Australians there was a clear trend for funerals to leave from an undertaker's premises rather than a home. In 1888 nearly all funerals started from a house. A few began from a hospital, and occasionally the cortege left from a Catholic church. In 1938 funerals rarely began from a hospital, perhaps one in ten left from a church, about half from a house, and three in ten from an undertaker's. Bereaved people in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth appear to have been readier than those in Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart to choose the funeral parlour as point of departure, and probably in every state the home was still more popular in country districts.

Close family and friends normally learned of a death in conversation, by telephone or by telegram; a larger circle of relatives and acquaintances learned by looking at death notices in newspapers, normally placed by an undertaker. Some families kept the disposal of the dead to themselves, announcing the funeral only after it had happened, and even when, as usual, friends and acquaintances and colleagues were welcome, the funeral remained first and last a family affair, next of kin telling the undertaker what to do with the body and how much to spend on doing it.

A funeral could cost less than £8 or well over £100, at a time when the basic wage was about £3 15s a week. A.V. Tobin Ltd of North Melbourne charged £7 12s for the funeral arrangements of Anastasia Clarke, who died in a church hostel: 4s to the *Age* for a death notice, £1 18s for opening a grave already purchased and occupied, 10s for a priest, and £5 for registering the death, supplying a plain coffin, and removing the remains to Tobin's and thence to the cemetery. The inner suburbs around Tobin's supplied the firm with working-class people who like the Tobins were Catholics. Their most expensive funeral for the year was supplied to Norman Godby, who paid £67 7s to bury his wife Helene Theresa. The death was announced prominently in Melbourne's three morning papers, the

THE LAST MAN TO LET YOU DOWN

'Dad was liked in his own right, but then a lot of people would cultivate his friendship or be friendly with him because he could help them a lot in their time of trouble. If they had a bereavement he could assist them a lot in what lodge to go to, or where they could get assistance financially. And for that reason he was regarded as everybody's friend. When I was able to go into hotels it was nothing for people to come up and say ..., "there's a corpsy drinking over there", "how's business today, Jack, pretty dead?" Very few people ... wanted to argue with Dad or cross him, because he was everybody's friend, everybody knew him. "There goes a stiffy", "he's the local planter", "there comes the body snatcher", ... "he's a good bloke, he'll walk beside you" or "he'll be the last man to let you down". But the normal joke was, "business pretty dead, Jack?"

After a funeral if there was no more work that day, we would pull up on the way back from the cemetery either at the Seabreeze Hotel or the Belfield Hotel or any other hotel halfway back from the cemetery, not only to have a drink but to relieve the person. On one occasion ... we parked the hearse about 100 yards past the hotel at Belmore. There was a bus-stop adjourning the hotel and there was an elderly lady who saw the two of us walk into the hotel. Dad was still wearing his long coat-tailed frock and I was still in black uniform and we rang home, Mum said there were no more funerals, nothing had come in so about an hour and a half later we left the hotel and went home. My mother said, "ring this woman urgently", so Dad went to the phone. It appears this woman had seen us two walk into the hotel and she let her bus go to see how long we were in there. Buses came every 20 minutes. She let three buses go and eventually caught the fourth one. She told Dad the men were still in the hotel and she thought that was disgusting. Dad said "well I think it is disgusting too, as soon as those two men return to the depot I will sack both of them immediately." She was delighted with Dad's action and we carried out her funeral some 12 months later.

R. Hawkins, 1938 COLLECTION

Reginald Hawkins, a railway apprentice, and his father, Jack, a coffin maker, opened their own business, Dignified Funerals, in 1938. Jack had just been sacked by Geo Andrews Limited of Ashfield, Sydney, because the owner took strong exception to his habit of walking across to Pascoe's hotel at lunchtime. Jack said 'I'm here to make coffins and what I do in my own time is nothing to do with you'. Jack Hawkins sometimes hired out himself and one of his cars for weddings in the morning. Here he waits in front of St Stephen's Presbyterian church in Macquarie Street. The same car, without the white ribbon, could well be in a funeral procession that afternoon.
R. HAWKINS, 1938 COLLECTION

body was wrapped in an imported satin shroud and placed in a casket, not a coffin. (Coffins tapered; caskets were oblong, more genteel and more expensive.) Mrs Godby's casket was of oak, french polished, upholstered with horsehair and swansdown, trimmed with ruffled silk drapery and mounted with silver-plated handles, crucifix, ornaments and nameplate. The hearse was followed by two
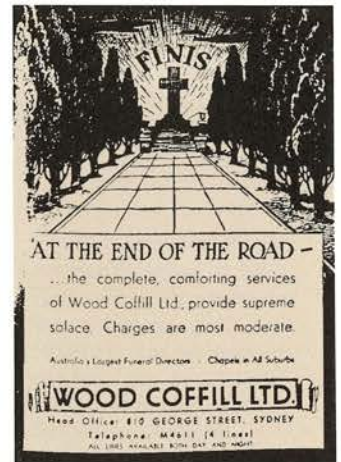
mourning limousines and a car laden with flowers. For a requiem mass at the parish church and a service at the graveside (for which synthetic grass was laid) the clergy were given £2 2s. The grave was a fresh plot, costing £12 15s.

An average Tobin's funeral was about £20, or between five and six times the basic wage. As a burden on the budget of a working man and his family a funeral weighed about the same as it had in 1888. Undertakers with a more lucrative catchment area, like A.A. Sleight Pty Ltd in Melbourne's St Kilda Road, close to the rich of Toorak, might charge £100 for a casket alone, and a few families might pay more than £50 for a grave site to accommodate a vault. It was said in the trade that if an undertaker got two 'Toorak funerals' a week, he was set.

People who died destitute and alone were buried by policemen. When a Labor member of the Victorian parliament proposed that public money be provided to ensure the proper Christian burial of corpses for whom no relative or friend took responsibility, the premier, Albert Dunstan, replied, according to the Labor man, 'Our job is to look after the living, not the dead'. Active members of the Unemployed Workers' movement did their best to see that nobody was buried without a decent funeral. In Port Melbourne, where many wharf labourers and stevedores were out of work, Dot Hills said the Movement 'had an arrangement with McKenzie, the undertaker ... that they'd bury the children of the unemployed cheap, £5 I think', and the undertaker recovered the money from the mayor, who paid out of his allowance. In Brisbane, Mick Healy declared, the movement made sure that they 'never had any pauper's burials'. Fear of that end could act powerfully on people whose ancestors had come out willingly or unwillingly from England, the land of the Poor Law. There, one historian suggests, 'the anonymity of a pauper's grave was regarded as the ultimate social disgrace'. In an outer suburb of Melbourne the widow of a postal worker made sure that she had enough money in a savings bank to pay for her funeral, though her two daughters and their husbands were willing and able to take care of it. Perhaps imagination, fuelled by a horror of poverty inherited from immigrant grand-parents, made her see the daughters dying first and herself at the mercy of strangers.

Critics of undertakers said that some of them induced needy people to pay too much for funerals. 'Reputable undertakers', replied the secretary of the Victorian Master Undertakers' Association, 'would not allow persons in poor circumstances to spend beyond their means, though many people, in their desire to do what they considered was right, often tried to do so'. It was in an undertaker's interest to prevent that, otherwise he might not be paid. Yet it was also in his interest to have people spend as much as they could, and in Australia as elsewhere undertakers attracted hostility because of their peculiar relationship with customers. 'The distress that accompanies bereavement', as A.A. Sleight Pty Ltd stated in an advertisement, 'is not conducive to calm comparison of prices and values...', and W.N. Bull Ltd in Sydney promised a funeral which avoided 'both mistaken economy and needless expense'. How could economy be mistaken? Were mourners being nudged to feel guilty at burying a loved one on the cheap? And what expense was needless, when the firm boasted a Rolls Royce hearse, 'the finest in Australia'?

Families committing themselves to a costly funeral when enduring the first shock of death could be resentful later when the bill arrived, wondering if their grief had been exploited. Possibly some sense of outrage at the very connection between death and commerce inspired morbid suspicions about undertakers: that the coffin used for a cremation was saved from the furnace to be sold again, or that in some other way the bereaved were being cheated. In Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, Joe Crowe, undertaker and cabman of Port Zodiac, varnishes a pine

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Methodist, *5 Mar 1938*.

coffin to sell it as rosewood and cuts 'silver' emblems from kerosene cans. When undertakers met, they wondered how to convince the public that their profits were not excessive, a task complicated by public knowledge of agreements within the trade to fix minimum prices for goods and services.

Hard times and public suspicion had prompted some people to look for alternatives to conventional undertakers. In Sydney and Melbourne undertakers were enduring competition from new 'burial societies' whose canvassers, knocking on thousands of doors in working-class suburbs, guaranteed a decent funeral for sixpence a week. Sydney's Labor Motor Funerals was the pioneer of such schemes, launched in 1934 as a trade union enterprise and taken over in 1936 by private shareholders close to the former Labor premier J.T. Lang. The founder of Labor Motor Funerals, Ben Box, left the firm in 1936 to establish along similar lines the Metropolitan Funeral, Burial and Cremation Society. That year the Victorian Master Undertakers' Association reported an 'increased growth in the sixpence a week burial societies, some of which were giving the Association a lot of concern'.

The challenge provoked traditional undertakers in 1935 to form their first national body, the Australian Funeral Directors' Association, and to press the government to control what one speaker at the first federal gathering called a 'cancer which was insidiously eating into the legitimate business of funeral directors'. The task of the association, said one member, was 'to express the dignity, importance and unique nature of our profession, as doctors, lawyers, chemists and the clergy have done for centuries . . .' Delegates assured each other that they were no mere tradesmen. 'Their work', said A.V. Tobin, 'was not the mere crude boxing up of a body and burying it. It was a sacred work requiring trained skill, organising ability and an appreciation of the fitness of things'. As it happened, the man who said that had been a fireman when he and his three brothers decided to become undertakers in 1934. Members of the professions with whom undertakers now liked to compare themselves might well think that an occupation which could be taken up so quickly was well and truly a trade. But there was significance in the undertakers' affirmation that they belonged to a profession and were engaged in 'a sacred work'.

Traditionally the undertaker had also been a cabinetmaker, building cupboards for the living and coffins for the dead, and there were men, especially in country towns, who still did both jobs. In the larger cities the undertaker had become more highly capitalised and more of a specialist. His premises were enlarged as more funerals left from them, and in the 1920s he had retired his black-plumed black horses and bought a petrol-driven hearse and black limousines to keep up with competitors who offered 'motor funerals'. Though his own employees might still make coffins, the workshop would be elsewhere, out of sight; he would not call himself a cabinetmaker. He encouraged the world to call him not a mere undertaker but a funeral director—someone who would take charge of proceedings. The title was American, common in the United States as early as the 1880s but unknown in the United Kingdom of 1938. Some Australian undertakers had been using it since before the Great War.

The Australian Funeral Directors' Association was named after an American organisation. At its convention in 1938 a delegate from Western Australia regretted that the Victorian Master Undertakers' Association had not yet changed the name by which it had been known since 1890; he urged the Victorians to catch up with other states and become a funeral directors' association. 'The word "undertaker" is obsolete', he said. Yet many Australians still preferred the old word, as practitioners recognised by paying to have themselves listed in trade directories both as 'undertaker' and as 'funeral director'.

The word 'mortician' did not cross the Pacific, and though many Australians agreed to buy what the supplier described as a casket, they preferred to go on calling it a coffin. Nor had the American taste for preserving bodies in a condition imitating life travelled to this country. Embalming was uncommon and was done only to preserve, not for cosmetic purposes as in the United States. Australians facing the business of death evidently felt more comfortable with old usages from their European motherlands than with more recent American customs. But they were being persuaded to adopt innovations which expressed the undertaker's increasing importance as an administrator of death. The premises to which more and more people came for mortuary ceremonies were known as funeral parlours or funeral homes—American, not British, words. The most up-to-date funeral parlours drew heavily on American models for their design and atmosphere. An architect briefing the national meeting of funeral directors in 1938 told them that 'the trend of a funeral home in other parts of the world was to depart from the older Gothic or Tudor styles of chapel, etc., to the comforts and quietness of the present home'. 'Gothic or Tudor' signalled darkness, gloom, the ecclesiastical.

Melbourne's oldest and most fashionable funeral director, A.A. Sleight Pty Ltd, opened new headquarters in 1938 designed to look like a sunny Californian version of the 1880s Italianate villas which were its neighbours along St Kilda Road. Nothing traditionally funereal met the eye of a mourner who approached this building, with its off-white stucco walls, green roof, striped canvas blinds and flowery windowboxes. 'The old-fashioned theory', announced Sleight's, 'that funerals should be associated with an atmosphere of gloom, drabness and depression has been abandoned'. The manager of another firm expressed the modern view of death by putting away his black clothes and dressing for the funeral in white suit, white shirt and white shoes, and only a black armband to represent old-style mourning. That was in Sydney, national centre of novelty and hedonism; and even there the hearses of all but this one innovator were preceded for at least part of their journey by a man in a black frock coat and top hat.

'On Melbourne's well-known tree-lined boulevard, St. Kilda Road, and directly opposite the Botanic Gardens, A.A. Sleight Pty. Ltd. has recently established new headquarters ... The old-fashioned theory that funerals should be associated with an atmosphere of gloom, drabness, and depression has been abandoned. In its place is an ideal of good taste, quiet beauty, and peace. Not harsh and forbidding is the tone of both premises and services, but warm and harmonious. There is something of the Spanish mission type of architecture in the new building, with its buff stucco walls, its green cement-tiled roof, its gaily coloured blinds coming from projecting hoods, its window-boxes and its green lawns ... Palms and flowers add appropriate touches of colour. Sunlight is admitted, and quietude prevails in an atmosphere redolent of the intimacy and privacy of a beautiful home. Adjoining are two chapels. Protestant services are conducted in the northern chapel, while the southern is used for Roman Catholic and High Church of England Services.' Argus weekend magazine, 20 Aug 1938.

In becoming 'funeral directors', undertakers were moving into ground long occupied by the clergy. When Sleight's offered 'a helping presence, restrained, unobtrusive and sympathetic', dispensing 'service which will soothe wracked emotions', a minister of religion might wonder what was left for him to do. His part in the rituals of death was tending to diminish in importance as the undertaker assumed more and more responsibility.

If the family wanted a clergyman but did not know one, the funeral director would attend to that. Since it was common practice for the undertaker to pay the clergyman his 'offering' and recover from the client, the clergyman could well have an uneasy feeling that he was being hired by the undertaker. For the increasing number of people who chose to have the ceremony begin at the funeral parlour, undertakers provided their own 'chapels'. Some of these conformed to what one architect called 'the ecclesiastical type', but Sydney's latest funeral parlours had an atmosphere as much cinematic as ecclesiastical. The architect of the new chapel at Kinsela's in Darlinghurst, C. Bruce Dellit, had also designed the Liberty and Paris picture theatres. Rays of amber glass on the doors were a metaphor for sunset; and the interior lighting and decorative detail, as in Dellit's Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, drew the eyes and mind upward without the help of any devices taken from traditional Christianity. Sleight's new building in Melbourne had two chapels in the cheerful renaissance style, one equipped for Catholic and High Anglican use with incense burner, candlesticks and altar rail, the other for Protestant tastes, having a simple altar of oak. More commonly a funeral parlour had one chapel designed to fit members of any faith, using or not using, for example, a crucifix according to the denomination and churchmanship of the mourners. Clergymen of course employed the rituals prescribed by their several denominations; but now they could also, if they wished, use a 'Service Book' prepared by undertakers.

When Canon L.L. Wenzel of the Church of England addressed the funeral directors' federal convention, he described a working relationship in which the clergyman contributed to a ceremony controlled by the undertaker. If a funeral director said to him 'We have five minutes', that gave him the clue, he said, that the people did not want a long-winded oration. He asked his listeners, however, not to maltreat the clergy, and recounted his own experiences of turning up at a house at the time nominated by the undertaker to find the cortege already on its way to the cemetery, and of being left shivering behind on a cold day as an undertaker's car drove away from a cemetery.

CEMETERIES

Most cemeteries were public amenities in the care of trustees appointed by governments. In all state capitals except Adelaide the ground in which the earliest European generations had been buried was no longer set aside for the dead. Land too valuable for skeletons was seized for a station, a market or some other enterprise of the living. Sometimes the human remains were moved to cheaper land further out; sometimes only the monuments were moved. Some of the fresh grounds filled quickly. Melbourne's second cemetery, on a 40-hectare site just north of the city, appeared large enough when it was opened in 1853, but was deemed full within half a century, and in 1904 bodies were diverted north to Fawkner and south to Spring Vale. In the depression, however, parsimonious eyes saw the verges of sweeping Victorian carriageways as useable ground, and the old cemetery opened again.

Sydney's planners did better. The Rookwood necropolis, opened in 1868 on 260 hectares of hilly ground beyond the southwestern suburbs and reached by funeral

trains for which special stations were built at either end, still seemed a wilderness in 1938, though the spread of population in other directions had caused suburban cemeteries to be laid out elsewhere. Graves in general cemeteries were arranged according to religious affiliation, a practice introduced by Sir Richard Bourke, governor of New South Wales from 1831 to 1838, who had liberally decided that the Church of England was not entitled here to the privileges it enjoyed at home, and that in death as in life the state should deal even-handedly with citizens of all faiths which had substantial followings. General cemeteries therefore had sections marked C.E., R.C., P. (Presbyterian), M. (Methodist), I. (Independent), B. (Baptist), H. (Hebrew) and O.D. (other denominations). Casual visitors could easily be unaware of which section they were in, for tastes in monumentary design did not follow denominational lines: Celtic crosses—introduced towards 1900 from Ireland—soared over the graves of the rich in the P. and even C.E. sections. By 1938, however, it was unusual for any new grave to be surmounted by a Celtic or other cross, or an obelisk or a column or an urn or any other conspicuous object. The reformers already at work in 1888 denouncing 'expensive, hideous, heathen-looking headstones' had converted many people to believing that what their parents viewed as a seemly splendour was really ostentation and pomposity, and the depression made its own contribution to flattening the cemeteries.

The flower shop at Rookwood cemetery, Sydney, did 'very good business' on Saturdays and Sundays, the most popular days for relatives and friends to visit the graves. Amy Burton's father was the lodgekeeper at Rookwood and took this photograph of the shop, situated at the corner of the Church of England section. The proprietors, Mr and Mrs Horsley, served meals during the week in the restaurant at the back.
A. BURTON, G. HUNT, 1938 COLLLECTION

CREMATION

One in ten corpses was not buried but burned, and the proportion was increasing fast. Australia was well on the way to first place among European societies in the use of cremation. The earliest ritual cremation in the history of the world may have been performed in Australia some 26 000 years ago; but among white Australians in 1888 the practice was unknown. Like many reform movements the campaign for cremation came out from England, where the first crematorium opened in

1885. Australia had twelve in 1938, nine of them opened since 1933, bringing the option of cremation to people in every state capital, Newcastle and Launceston. In Sydney, with four crematoria, cremation was chosen for about one body in four.

The cremation reformers had pressed their case on grounds of hygiene, taste, economy and equality. Was it the egalitarian aspect that made the practice so attractive to Australians? The crematorium, said the Cremation Society of Australia, was a place 'where all meet upon the same level, the rich and the poor alike, and there the remains of the humblest person receives the same respectful care and attention as bestowed upon that of the most wealthy and renowned'. The cremation movement recognised and encouraged, as funeral directors were doing, a modern distaste for the physical facts of mortality and a modern aversion to the darkness of mourning. The Cremation Society's own funeral service provided for the body to be 'at once removed from the house and taken direct to the Service Hall of the Crematorium', and was designed to 'take the place of the dreary and mournful funeral usually associated with earth burial ...' North Italian Roman-esque was popular among architects of crematoria, because it avoided Gothic gloom and because the chimney could be disguised as a bell tower.

Cremation could be cheaper than burial, for no land need be bought, no grave dug, no stone tablet made and inscribed. The charge to cremate a body at Rookwood in Sydney was £6 and 'preparation of the Ashes and dispersing to the Four Winds of Heaven' cost 10s 6d. A niche for ashes cost from £2 2s to £4 4s, a memorial rosebush £5 5s, and an urn more. The cost of getting the body from place of death to the crematorium had to be added. In New South Wales life membership of the Cremation Society cost £15 15s and assured members of a complete service from death to ashes, the society negotiating with the undertaker to prepare the body, put it in a coffin and transport it. This scheme was a cremator's version of the new burial societies, and caused some friction with undertakers.

Cremators, keen not to have their movement damaged as in the United States by the antagonism of funeral directors, insisted that life members were few, and that for most clients 'cremation need not affect in any way the business of the funeral director, his price, the type of casket, nor anything else'. He could trade in

urns—though in Australia, said Roy Allison, principal of a big firm in Melbourne, 'it was the devil's own job for an undertaker to try and sell an urn'. The diplomacy of cremators was skilful enough to prevent public opposition from the funeral industry. 'Cremation at Rookwood or Northern Suburbs', said an advertisement at the foot of funeral notices in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'For all information consult an undertaker'.

The bodies cremated were nearly all those of Protestants living in or near cities; most rural Australians were too far from a crematorium to make use of it, and Catholics were forbidden to do so. In Australia as elsewhere the reformers had to contend at first with both Catholic and Protestant suspicions that burning the dead was incompatible with belief in the resurrection of the body. Theologians assured believers that, as a pioneer of Australian cremation put it, God 'must be as able to recreate the body whether it has been resolved into its original elements by the ordinary process of decay or by the quicker and more clean method of burning'. Even so, some Australian Catholics needed to be told in 1938 that their church's prohibition was contingent, having been imposed in the nineteenth century because the cremation movement in continental Europe had anti-clerical auspices: one day cremation might be permitted to the faithful. The cremation of the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Harrington Lees, in 1929—six years before the first of his peers in England—demonstrated that adherents to the Church of England need not be troubled about the practice, and in 1938 the cremators could quote an Australian bishop as saying that it was 'growing daily among the faithful of our Church'.

THE ANZAC DEAD

Twelve former members of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) died in 1938 of wounds they had endured for twenty years and more. They were entitled to burial by the commonwealth Department of Repatriation in graves made to the design of the Imperial War Graves Commission, but relatives normally chose to bury former AIF men as members of families rather than have them lie under tablets recording number, rank and unit. While most of the old soldiers were still alive, the RSL, anticipating a larger need, was negotiating with the keepers of cemeteries to reserve blocks of land for 'soldier burials'. Around the graves of the most famous soldiers, pilgrims gathered each year to pay tribute on or near the anniversary of their deaths. Captain Albert Jacka, VC (died 1932), was given that honour on 18 January and General Sir John Monash (died 1931) on 24 October. The body of Major-General Sir Talbot Hobbs was seen to its grave in Perth on 14 May by thousands of people, among them militiamen, returned soldiers and boy scouts. Hobbs had died on his way to France, where he had hoped to attend the unveiling of a great memorial to Australian war dead.

More than 60 000 of the 330 000 Australian men who had gone as volunteers to war in 1914–18 died on the other side of the world, and their bodies stayed there. They were still being dug up. Many people must have wondered when reading the papers on 22 January whether the body of an Australian soldier just exhumed near Pozières was a son or brother, for more than 18 000 Australians who died in France and Belgium had no known graves. On 22 July a monument to Australians killed in France was unveiled at Villers-Bretonneux, near Amiens, by King George V in the company of the president of France, three ministers in the commonwealth government (Sir Earle Page, R.G. Menzies and Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas White), the high commissioner in London, S.M. Bruce, and a guard of honour of 400 old soldiers and eight nurses from Australia. The

The Sydney Mail *pays tribute to the* ANZAC *dead.* Sydney Mail, *27 Apr 1938.*

inscription recorded that 1200 Australians had died to capture this town in April 1918. About 11 000 names were listed, and for each missing man stood a stone inscribed 'A soldier of the Great War/An Australian regiment/Known Unto God'. Throughout Australia flags were flown that day at half-mast.

The war dead were also remembered on 11 November, when Australians joined with old allies to mark with poppies and silence the ending of the war on that day in 1918. The poppies, emblems in red cloth imitating the flowers that grew in Flanders fields, were sold to raise money for war orphans and worn on men's lapels and women's breasts. The silence lasted for two minutes from 11 am, the hour of the armistice twenty years before; traffic stopped, men and women stood still on footpaths, children bowed heads in schoolgrounds. Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, dedicated exactly four years earlier, was so designed that a ray of sunlight fell on the Rock of Remembrance at the sacred moment. Armistice Day was not a public holiday, and the RSL resisted naming it Remembrance Day, as some people in England were doing. Australia's day of remembrance, the occasion for popular and obligatory homage to the dead soldiers, was Anzac Day.

Since 1918 the landscape had been studded with memorials to soldiers: statues and columns and towers and arches were raised in nearly every suburb and township, and grand civic monuments in capital cities. Of the latter only the national memorial in Canberra was incomplete, delayed by the depression. Rituals had been created around these memorials. At dawn on 25 April people gathered to recall with pride and grief the dawn landing at Gallipoli in 1915. Later in the day returned men wearing civilian clothes and medals marched to the memorials in memory of the absent dead, and to hear it said that their fighting and their mates' dying had made Australia a nation. In Sydney 43 000 marching men turned eyes left in Martin Place where a bronze soldier and sailor guarded the Cenotaph, which was surrounded by wreaths; 50 000 people had assembled there at dawn. Some of

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, with the deputy prime minister Sir Earle Page, at Villers-Bretonneux, in France, on 22 July 1938 for the unveiling of a monument to about 11 000 Australian soldiers who had died in France and Belgium during the Great War and had no known graves.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Melbourne's marchers were sorry to have lost the temporary cenotaph which used to be placed each year on the steps of parliament house. The shrine was a mighty temple, inspired by two wonders of the ancient world, the Parthenon at Athens and the tomb of King Mausolus at Halicarnassus, but it lacked a place which invited mourners to lay their wreaths in memory of the dead. Some old soldiers were campaigning for a permanent cenotaph in Melbourne, and local memorials were often known as cenotaphs even when they were not. The word meant 'empty tomb', and that was what many people wanted their war memorial to be, as they thought of men buried on the other side of the world. This year, ribbons from wreaths placed on capital city memorials were collected and burned and the ashes taken to be scattered at Villers-Bretonneux.

Australians were divided as well as united by the mourning ceremonies of Anzac Day. Whenever clergymen took part in a ritual, no Catholic priest was among them and no Catholic lay people, whether returned soldiers or lifelong civilians, were supposed to attend, for their church prohibited participation in any religious worship other than its own. In 1938, for the first time, the RSL organisers of Melbourne's Anzac Day deferred to Catholic objections by excluding Christian ministers and messages from the ceremony at the shrine. Catholic leaders were gratified. This year, said the preacher at the requiem high mass in St Patrick's Cathedral on 25 April, the brand of inferiority had been removed from the memory of the dead and from the living. Leaders of other denominations were dismayed; 'a service which leaves entirely out of account Christ's victory over death', said the Presbyterian Moderator-General, Dr F.W. Rolland, 'has no real comfort in it for those who still mourn the loss of loved ones'. Old wounds were opened up. General Sir Harry Chauvel withdrew in protest from the ceremony after leading the march for years, provoking Archbishop Daniel Mannix to observe that Australian soldiers often had to go over the top without any leader.

A small minority of Irish-Australians could not embrace on any terms an occasion that celebrated the hated British Empire. For them the time to mourn was not Anzac Day but the anniversary of the beginning of Dublin's Easter Rising in 1916; and on that day radical Irish patriots gathered at the monument to Ireland's martyrs of 1798 in Sydney's Waverley cemetery. For socialists and pacifists, too, what was said and done on Anzac Day could seem an unfit commemoration of war's victims. On 7 August members of the Australian Women's Movement for Social and Economic Research made a pilgrimage to the shrine to protest against poverty and war. They were acting in defiance of the shrine's trustees, to whom using the memorial for political protest was a kind of sacrilege.

Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1938. From the cemetery wall, two Australian soldiers salute the memorial to their departed comrades.
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

MOURNING

Australians in 1938 went in for less mourning than those of 1888. Black crepe was not so visible now, in women's dresses or on windows, though bereaved women commonly wore dark clothes and men at funerals wore black ties and often black armbands. In Europe, some writers say, the war had initiated a decline in formal mourning. What would become of national morale if the mother of every dead soldier put on crepe? How could all that slaughter be accommodated by traditional modes of grieving? Yet even before the war, critics in England and Australia were making some headway against what a Funeral Reform Association in the Sydney of 1890 described as 'the unnecessary expense and display which have gradually become a part of our Funeral and Mourning customs ...' The fashion that turned undertakers into funeral directors and inspired a firm such as Sleight's to announce the banishment of 'gloom, drabness and depression' came not from Europe but the United States, where relatively few families had lost sons in the war.

*Twenty-five-year-old
Mildred Thomson took this
photograph with her box
Brownie when her mother,
Lilian Thatcher, and her
aunts returned from their
father's funeral. Sombrely
attired in black coats and hats
and carrying gloves, the six
sisters posed outside Lilian's
home in Dundas Road,
Maryborough, Victoria.
From left to right are Emily,
Alice, Lilian, Eileen, Florence
and Elsie.*

M. THOMSON, 1938 COLLECTION

The lengthening expectation of life, a factor common to white Australia, north America and much of Europe, helped to abridge mourning, as fewer families were struck by the death of their young, and more people died in old age of cancer or a degenerative disease—their dying a bereavement, to be sure, but also a welcome end to suffering, a release. Traditional mourning was also being eroded by agents of modernity such as the motor car. A cortege without black-plumed horses seemed to many older people not truly a solemn procession, and in cities the new traffic lights—the first came to Sydney in 1933—broke up a funeral's solemn stream, although sometimes the police turned off the lights and delayed traffic while a funeral passed. Respect for the dead was expressed by the low speed of a procession, no more than thirty kilometres an hour, and it was still customary for people to stand still as a cortege passed, the men removing their hats.

We do not know how many people were comforted by belief in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection when they or their loved ones faced death. Nor do we know how many had their behaviour affected or their sleep troubled by fear of damnation—a doctrine still proclaimed, but not so vividly as in earlier times. Certainly there were Catholics for whom the initials R.I.P. (*Requiescat in Pace*), inserted in a death notice or carved on a grave, signified a literal prayer for a soul in purgatory; and there were Protestants who assented to every biblical word spoken by the minister in home, funeral chapel or church, and gave thanks for the life of someone they hoped confidently to meet, transfigured, in heaven.

We cannot measure how often orthodox beliefs were tinctured, contested or replaced in Australian minds by notions of death originating in pre-Christian Greece and Rome, enlightenment Europe or one of the religions of the East. Pagan rather than Christian habits of mind prompted the idea that fate may have induced certain travellers to cancel their bookings on the doomed airliner *Kyeema*; and to make sunlight touch the Rock of Remembrance in Melbourne's Shrine at the

eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month perhaps hinted that some capricious supernatural power had chosen to stop the war at that moment. Cults denying death such as Spiritualism and Christian Science had small and fervent constituencies. At the census of 1933, 13 029 people said that they had no religion; presumably they, and some of the 848 848 Australians—13 per cent—who declined to answer the question, believed that death was the end.

The average Australian of 1938 was much less likely than the medieval European or the contemporary tribal Aborigine, and rather less likely than the Australian of 1888, to see the light or shadow of eternity falling on the round of daily life. There is one measure, limited but precise, of difference between 1938 and 1888. People who placed 'In Memoriam' notices in the newspapers of 1888, marking anniversaries of death, more often than not used the word 'died', and when they avoided it they favoured the term 'departed this life', implying some kind of posthumous journey. By 1938 only a minority said 'died' and four times as many preferred 'passed away', a euphemism not used in the notices of 1888, which suggested ceasing to exist. If the authors of these notices were typical, Australians were finding it increasingly difficult to use direct language about death and to believe in life beyond it.

The most popular of living Australian poets, C.J. Dennis, had put into the mouth of his Sentimental Bloke an epitaph for Ginger Mick, killed at Gallipoli. It expressed no hope of resurrection and contained no reference to the supernatural:

'E found a game 'e knoo, and played it well;
An' now 'e's gone. Wot more is there to tell?

The poet must have judged this to be a common view of death, or he would not have given it to the Bloke. Dennis himself died on 22 June, in hospital, at the age of 61, of heart failure brought on by chronic asthma. His widow had him buried according to the rites of the Catholic Church into which he had been baptised, though as an adult he had not been in the habit of worship. The ceremony was both civic and ecclesiastical: non-Catholic men eminent in the arts and journalism were among the pallbearers. The grave in Melbourne's Box Hill cemetery bore not the customary Catholic R.I.P., but lines from a late poem by Dennis depicting sunset:

Now is the healing, quiet hour that fills
This gay, green world with peace and grateful rest.

Roy William Gropler's headstone in Adelaide's West Terrace cemetery. Gropler was known for his flight from England to Darwin between December 1935 and January 1936. Photograph by P. Finlay, 1984.

MY FATHER'S FUNERAL

*Beth Williams was born on 19 January 1924 in
Wagga Wagga, NSW. On 21 January 1938 Beth's father,
William Henry Doubleday, died. Here, Beth writes about her father's
funeral, describing the funeral and mourning procedures.*

This photograph of Beth Williams was taken by photographer Ernest Tooley of Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, in 1938.

IN THE WINTER OF 1937 he had travelled to Sydney for an operation on a duodenal ulcer, and was apparently recovering when cancer was diagnosed. For the remaining few weeks of his life he was nursed by my mother, older sisters and two professional nurses, one for the day and one at night. Our family doctor called every day—he was a friend, though not in the social sense, and the family believed that it was my father's complete faith in the skill of Dr Weedon which prolonged his life for some weeks.

On the day of his death I was aware of a hushed, anticipatory, quiet feeling—everyone was very subdued but it was not dramatic. We were aware, as we had been for several days, of the suffering he was enduring from constant hiccups. About 2 pm my mother called us in for a very short final visit—it was quiet, sorrowful, but not, at that time, very emotional. About two hours later we were told by the sister that father had died, and asked if we would like to go back into the room. The assumption was made by older members that I should not, and I accepted that. They, too, stayed outside—my mother was still with my father. Everyone was tearful, but controlled, aware that the dreadful pain was over for my father. Mother was stoic, accepting, no doubt weary. She was surrounded by us all—five daughters and three sons—as well as friends, other relatives and the medical team.

When it came to the funeral arrangements, again she was in a fortunate position, as Alan Harris the funeral director was a connection by marriage. There were two funeral directors in Wagga, but Alan Harris was much more advanced and was introducing innovations—not only the latest hearses and the mourning cars, but also such things as 'false grass' around the graveside, huge trays to carry floral tributes, and staff to carry out tasks to ease the bereavement for mourners in a businesslike but dignified manner. As my father held a prominent place in the community it was expected that a great number of people would wish to attend the funeral, so it was suggested that it should take place on either the following day, Saturday, or Sunday. My mother immediately vetoed Sunday—'it is Beth's birthday'—so the funeral was held the day after my father's death.

Another family friend was the owner of a local dress and manchester store, and a phone call to him resulted in the delivery to our home of boxes of dresses and hats suitable for a funeral, from which to choose. Mother was dressed completely in black (dress, hat, stockings, shoes, handbag and gloves), as were my older sisters, the only variation being a small white organdie collar, or a white grosgrain ribbon on a hat. Some sleeves were short but most were long. One dress had a row of little red buttons on the bodice, but these were replaced with small glass buttons. The materials were georgette, linen and a rayon material, which I think was called morocain. Most people attending the funeral would have worn black or at least the 'quietest' clothes they had. The men wore black armbands and hatbands, a black or very dark tie, and the darkest suit they could muster. I was considered, at barely fourteen, too young to wear black, and my outfit consisted of the black shoes and stockings of my school uniform, and a white dress! I remember feeling horribly conspicuous and ill dressed, but older members of the family assumed that I would feel better in that than I would in 'mourning'.

The period for wearing mourning clothes extended for six months. After the first three months the black stockings were replaced with flesh-coloured ones but the black dresses and accessories continued for at least another three months; then, for the widow, there was a longish period of wearing grey or white or pastel colours, and avoiding floral or 'loud' colours. During the first three months of mourning we did not have any social activities such as attending the cinema or dancing.

On the day of the funeral I felt unable to cope with attending, but conformed with yet another assumption by everyone that, of course, all the family would be there. No-one asked what I wanted and I would not have dreamt of mentioning my doubts. I was fearful of how I would handle the occasion. The funeral was held in the old Methodist church in Wagga, and I remember a church full of people, the music and the flowers, our minister (Mr Gould) giving the eulogy, but, strangely, have no 'memory-picture' of father's coffin. My abiding memory is of leaving the church and, as I came down the front steps, being overwhelmed as I saw the casket being placed in the hearse—there were plenty of comforting hands but my inward fears had been realised. The long journey to Coolamon cemetery allowed me to recover, and for some reason I was not so upset at the graveside.

After the interment our family, many relatives and friends were invited to the tearooms of a Coolamon cafe owner, Herb Tokley, to a sort of 'high tea'. Again this must have been a wonderful assistance to my mother and older sisters. It was a measure of the high regard in which my parents were held that everyone wanted to do what they could to help.

There remained the huge task of replying to messages, letters, cards, flowers, so 'Return Thanks' cards were ordered and sent out. These were not quite so 'funereal' as earlier cards had been, but carried only a small black line across one corner. Also the mandatory 'Return Thanks' notice was placed in both the Wagga *Daily Advertiser* and the *Coolamon Review*, in case by any misfortune we had missed thanking someone personally and individually.

Portraits of my parents, William Henry and May Doubleday, painted by an unknown itinerant artist shortly after William Henry's death. The portrait of William Henry was painted from a photograph taken of him in about 1908; that of his widow was from life and reflects her sorrow at the time.

Industry, *by Herbert Gallop, is one of two large murals in the foyer of the Great Northern Hotel in Newcastle, which opened its doors on 24 January 1938.* Industry *emphasises the dignity of manual labour against an idealised view of the BHP wharves and steelworks at Newcastle. Oil and tempera on canvas. Photograph by John Freund, 1986.*

IV
WORK
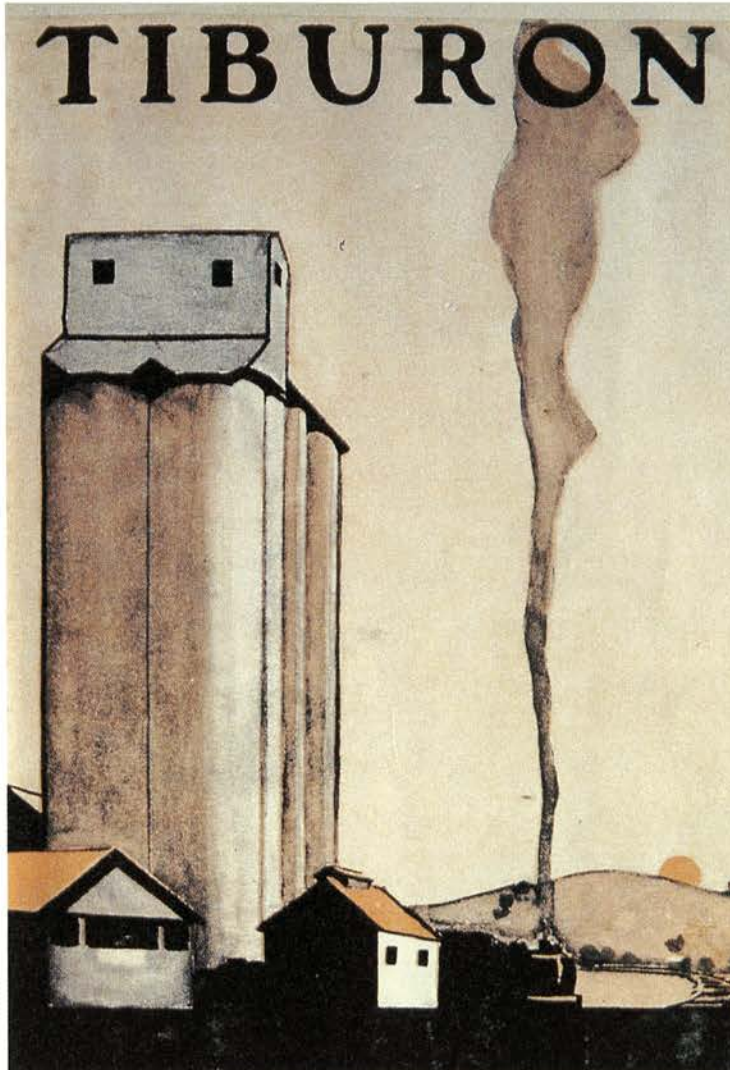
This stylish book jacket for Kylie Tennant's novel Tiburon,
*published in 1935, shows the new silos which were
revolutionising the storing and transport of wheat in the
1930s.* Tiburon *is a comic account of life in a small country
town.*
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