

Douglas Merritt &
Francis Greenacre
with Katharine
Stace, *Public
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Bristol*, (Liverpool
University Press
2011), lxx + 306
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Jonathan Harlow

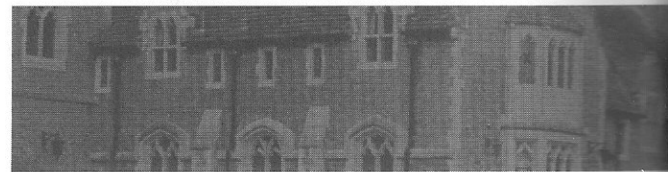
Rodney Hall, *Popeye Never Told You* (Pier
9, Murdoch Books Pty Ltd, 2010), ISBN
9781741967593, Hard cover, 276pp, \$AU29.00
(available from www.murdochbooks.com.au)

Published childhood memories of World War Two are more often documentary accounts written by others, or scenes and fragments written into novels and short stories; they are rarely complete books written by professional authors. Rodney Hall lived in Gloucestershire just north of Bristol and was five years old when war broke out.

With his mother and siblings, they lived in a flat above a garage and whenever German bombers came near they dived under the piano, disregarding the large petrol storage tank in the forecourt below; one day the undertaker's parlour on the other side of the road was completely destroyed by a bomb.

But this is not an account of dramatic events, rather the mundane comings and goings of the adults in Master Hall's life fleshed with the wry humour of a child's observations. Memories are reconstructed from the language, the artefacts and the issues of the day using prose in the first person address of the child; the Popeye in the title was a favourite comic character; '...even Gran says Popeye sets a good example because he eats his vegetables, but all Popeye ever eats is spinach and the trouble is that Gran means turnips and swedes as well ...' and later; 'and this is our first time seeing a film at night but wouldn't you guess! right in the middle of everything the air raid sirens go off! damn damn! and the manager comes out on the stage in front of Tarzan whos still wrestling a crocodile and he tells us to make haste.'

For your reviewer, who was brought up in the 1950s during the lengthy and still resonant period of post-War reconstruction, these writings strongly evoke place and time, scabs on the knee, Horlicks tablets 'n'all. There is much to recognize and recall in the constant little anxieties bubbling in the child's mind as he copes with understanding the world compounded in Hall's account by the



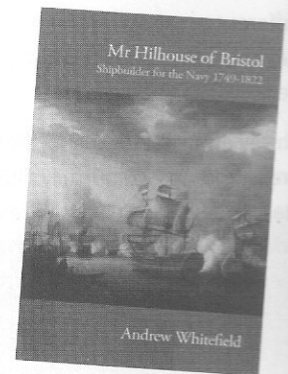
numbing confinements of the war effort and wartime Britain.

To distract the children during air raids a tin of photographs collected by their mother from her childhood at the family farm in Kangaroo Valley, Australia, was often produced. Examined by torchlight in their refuge, horses, termite mounds, carts, picnics, flies, campfires and blinding sunlight illuminate the imaginary place of safety. At the age of thirteen, after it was all over, Rodney Hall moved with his family to New South Wales and from his mid-twenties lived by his Award winning writing.

Mike Leggett,
University of Technology Sydney

Andrew Whitefield,
*Mr Hilhouse of
Bristol: Shipbuilder
for the Navy,
1749-1822* (Redcliffe,
Bristol, 2010), ISBN
978-1-906593-68-1,
184pp., £15.99.

James Martin Hilhouse was one of eighteenth century Bristol's most important entrepreneurial dissenting merchants and this is the first full biography to appear in print. The son of a successful Presbyterian sugar refiner in Lewins Mead, James Hilhouse opened his first Hotwells shipyard and dock in 1772 and rose swiftly to prominence thereafter. Hilhouse made the most of his family contacts with dissenting business networks, and with the assistance of business associates like John Noble and William Champion, founded a dynasty of successful ship builders and, in his renowned Albion Dockyard, a Bristol landmark in continuous use until 1977.



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