

Since its publication in 2006, the novel „We, the drowned“ has been translated into more than 20 languages and has sold more than half a million copies.

It has been transformed into everything from Japanese anime to a Dutch musical, so the novel – which is centred around Marstal, the town on Ærø Island, Denmark where Carsten Jensen grew up – has proved its worth as a truly global story that speaks to readers all over the world.

In 2007, a novel entitled „Sidste Rejse“ (Final journey) was published about the Danish artist Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen. Many people consider this new novel to be a sequel to „We, the drowned“ because it features a number of the same characters.

Then in 2009 Carsten Jensen and Karsten Hermansen teamed up to publish „Vi sejlede bare“ (We were just sailing), which describes the process behind the creation of „We, the drowned“. As such, it provides fascinating insight into the research done by the author, which included visits to the nursing home on Ærø to listen to old sailors’ yarns.

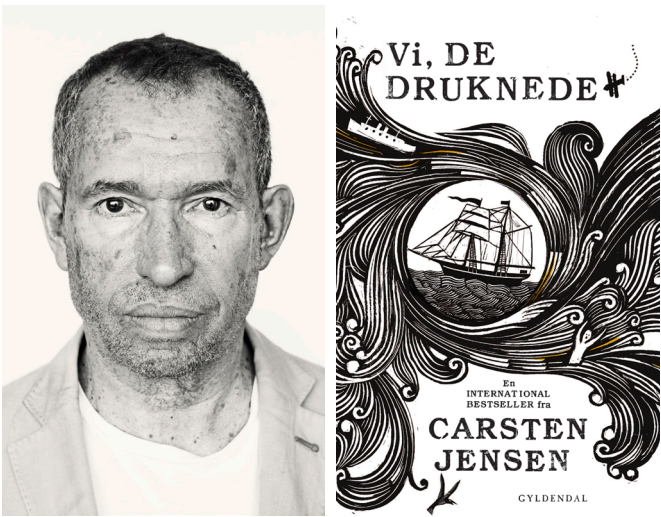
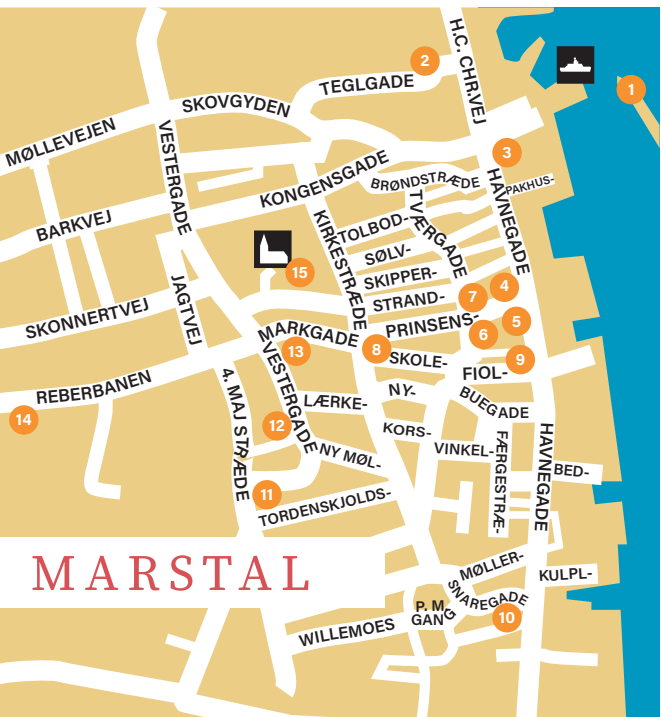


Photo: Isak Hoffmeyer



Carsten Jensen’s novel „We, the drowned“ plays out against a truly authentic background: namely, the town of Marstal on Ærø.

1. The old Pier

Construction of the 1.2 km pier was started back in 1825 and the first phase – stretching approx. 300 metres – took around six years to complete. The work was initiated by Rasmus Jepsen, a local skipper who is buried in the old graveyard by Marstal Church. The stones for the pier were collected from the fields in the summer and transported to the harbour. When the water froze in the winter, the stones were positioned out on the ice. When the ice then melted in the spring, they dropped to the seabed where volunteer workers moved them into position using poles, block and tackle.



2. Carl Rasmussen’s House

Teglgade 2 is the address of the house where the artist Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen lived with his wife Anna Egidia and their eight children. Carl Rasmussen designed the house himself. It looks a little different today as it has been renovated and modernised with the installation of new windows, for example. However, it is still possible to discern how the original windows would have looked.

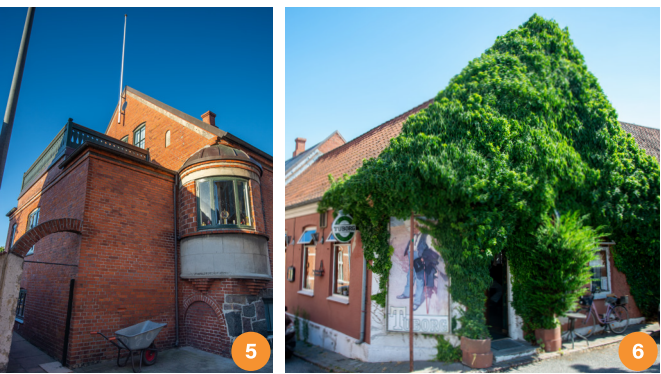


3. Memorial Stone

This is the memorial stone that Albert E. Boye (the inspiration for Albert Madsen in the novel) took the initiative to have erected in 1913 as thanks for the incredible work done on building the pier. A document containing a detailed description of the procurement and installation of the stone is embedded in the concrete foundation, encased in a sealed lead pipe.

4. Albert’s Merchant’s Villa

On the corner of Prinsensgade and Havnegade stands the property dating from 1855 that ship-owner H. C. Christensen (Farmer Sofus in the novel) had built for his family and to run as a grocery/ships’ chandlery. The building is now part of Marstal Maritime Museum and houses a permanent exhibition of works by the artist Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen, famed for his seascapes and paintings of Greenland.



5. Albert’s House

The fine red brick building at Prinsensgade 5, with its round bay window and east-facing balcony, was originally a bank, then a private residence, and then – from 1980 – the office of Albert E. Boye’s ship-brokering business (before that, the office was at Prinsensgade 3). Today, it is a private home once more. It provided the inspiration for the bay window Carsten Jensen writes about in the novel, from which Klara Friis looks out over the sea she so deeply resents.

6. Weber’s Café

Just opposite Prinsensgade 5, on the corner of Tværgade, stands the inn called Toldbodhus. It was previously called Weber’s Café and is still a favoured meeting point for ships’ skippers and other local worthies.

7. H. C. Grube’s House

Across the road from Prinsensgade 5 stands Prinsensgade 6. This was the private residence and office of ship broker H. C. Grube, built in 1899 to replace a former timber-framed construction. H. C. Grube was the first ship broker in Marstal and a driving force behind the establishment of a telegraph station. His career is the inspiration for the character Lorentz in the novel.





8. The School on Skolegade

On the corner of Skolegade and Kirkestræde stands the restaurant Vingården. This was once the site of the second school in Marstal, built in 1803 and extended several times. At times, more than 300 children attended this school at the same time, with classes numbering up to 70 pupils. It was here that the teacher Hans Frederik Ishøy (Schoolmaster Isager in the novel) lived from 1821 to 1862. His gravestone can still be found in the churchyard at Marstal Church, just south of the old chapel.

9. Marine Insurance

The marine insurance building on the corner of Skolegade and Havnegade dates back to 1904. Søassuranceforeningen Ærø (Ærø Marine Insurance Association) was founded in 1876 by local ship owners to guard against financial losses on shipwrecks. It is still a well-preserved building with fine details from the late 1800s. Some parts, such as the windows, have been renewed, but all work has been done with respect for authenticity.

10. Snaregade

We have now reached Snaregade, where Klara Friis lived with her son Knud Erik, whom Albert Madsen – to Klara’s great regret – taught to row. This is purely the invention of the author, and there is no actual building that directly inspired the story.



11. The School of Navigation

On the corner of Tordenskjoldsgade and Vestergade stands the property that was built in 1881 as a school of navigation. Before then, navigation was taught at several locations in the town. The school remained open until 1975, when the new navigation college on Egehovedvej was completed. The original building is now the setting for various activities for the townspeople.

12. The School on Vestergade

The school on Vestergade was built in 1886 and served as a school for 80 years. When the new central school on Halvejen opened its doors in 1969/70, the former school was converted into a town hall for the Municipality of Marstal. The building is now a health centre.

13. The Well

On the corner of Vestergade and Markgade, you can still see the well where the women in the novel hid when Laurids Madsen “declared war on the Germans”. It was also along Markgade and on down Reberbanen that the boys enticed the teacher’s wife’s dog “Karo” out to the cliff at Trappeskov, where they killed it.



14. Employees’ Residence

The large, yellow 2½-storey building at Reberbanen 45/47 was built in 1917 as a residence for the workers employed at Marstal Steel Shipyard. The real life Valdemar Henckel needed ships to carry bricks from his brickworks on West Zealand to destinations including Norway. He first founded Kalundborg Jernskibsværft (Iron Shipyard) before buying a stake in the Marstal Staalskibsbyggeri shipbuilding company. The building originally consisted of 12 apartments, but has now been converted into sheltered accommodation for people with mental disabilities.

15. The Church

Marstal Church was originally built in 1738. The side aisles were added in the 1770s and the existing tower in 1920. The christening font actually stems from Tranderup Church, another church on Ærø. The altarpiece from 1881 is the work of Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen, who is well-known for his seascapes and paintings of Greenland. The image depicts Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Another work by the same painter in the church shows the storm immediately before Jesus calmed the waters. On the east side of the church is a memorial tablet to the Battle of Eckernförde on 5 April 1849, where the warship Christian VIII participated. In the novel, it was during this battle that Laurids Madsen flew up into the clouds and survived on account of his boots. In front of the church stands a memorial to the citizens of Marstal who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

