

Carol Lefevre, *Quiet City: Walking in West Terrace Cemetery* (Wakefield Press, 2016)

Have you ever stood by the graveside of a man who was killed by a tiger? Or speculated why a married woman would be so unhappy that she could bring herself to drink belladonna? Or perhaps considered why a girl might be buried under a false name? These are a handful of the extraordinary stories of otherwise ordinary lives that I encountered in the pages of Carol Lefevre's *Quiet City: Walking in West Terrace Cemetery*.

The cemetery is located in my home town, the city of Adelaide, in the south-western corner of the parklands 'on the flank of the living city' (314). The site is 'woven into the social, political and religious history of South Australia' (x), the burial place of early settlers and colonists, law-makers and politicians, artists and musicians. There are Quaker, Jewish and Catholic sections, and names as familiar as Charles Campbell and as foreign as Carl Linger. As Lefevre takes her reflective walks here, she observes that 'there is much to be gleaned about memory and identity, about public and private emotion, and about the way which we have arrived at where we are now' (xiii). She shares these insights in the 25 beautifully-written sections of her book, beginning with walks taken 'Under summer skies' and ending with a 'Remembrance walk' and 'a last ramble in the quiet city'.

As Lefevre explains in her introduction, the book is comprised of 'a personal sampler of the lives that have interested me' (xii) – a collection of stories based on history and facts, but not solely limited to them. 'I am not a historian but a writer with a love of stories' (xii). She has done thorough research in the cemetery archives and state records, and then enlivened and enriched this information with a true story-teller's gifts – an eye for vivid detail and a lyrical turn of phrase.

The stories begin in the nineteenth century, with the early colonists, men and women arriving on the ships from Britain. Lefevre writes about our famous ancestors, men like Colonel Light and Robert Gouger, but also of 'more obscure' and ordinary people whose stories would otherwise go unrecorded. Hence we read about the circus performer who was killed by a tiger, and young Mrs Duff, the wife of one of the first ships' captains ('her baby is like her husband, therefore not very beautiful'). Later, in the twentieth century, there is the married woman who drank belladonna and died in Carrington Street, and a girl called Winifred Goater who was buried as 'Mary Elliot' because she fell pregnant to the wrong man.

Lefevre's research into these lives reveals a different side of South Australian history, informed by but separate from the official records of the government that we celebrate on Proclamation Day. This rich social history mirrors the lives of ordinary people, the day-to-day conditions in which they lived, thrived, suffered and died. I learnt, to my amazement, that it was once 'commonplace' for unwanted children as young as three-year-old Charles Godfrey to be handed over to circuses to work as apprentices. 'All the touring circuses took them' (84). There were no formal procedures for adoption in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; these children might spend the rest of their lives with their circus 'families'.

I was less surprised to learn of the conditions which led to Winifred Goater's death in 1906. Unmarried and ashamed of her pregnancy to 'a man known to her as Will Cameron', she sought the help of a Doctor Sheridan, who practised medicine in Unley. When the young woman died of a 'haemorrhage following a miscarriage ... induced by unnatural means' (103), the two men conspired to have her buried in the cemetery under the name of Mary Elliot. (They were helped by a local undertaker whose name was Frederick Elliott).

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Lefevre pieces Winifred's story together from court records and newspaper accounts (Francis Sheridan was tried for his many crimes; he was sentenced to ten years' hard labour in Yatala Prison for the manslaughter of another of his 'patients', Adelaide Ray). Other women's stories cannot be told in such revealing detail; they slip between the gaps of lived experience and written records. This is the case with Annie Hooper, the young wife who came home from a dance and poisoned herself with belladonna in 1941:

There is so much to wonder at in this story. Were Annie and her husband together at the dance? And if they went as a couple what happened to make her decide to leave alone, come home, and take her own life? We can only suppose that Keith Hooper destroyed the [suicide] note because his wife's explanation reflected badly on him. But what of the second letter? Who was it addressed to? And what became of ... Annie's child? (94)

There are mysteries and secrets like these throughout the quiet city, unknowable truths as well as verifiable facts. Carol Lefevre also writes eloquently about the physical surroundings of the cemetery: the stony soil and mottled headstones; in springtime, the lush grass and scented jonquils between marble crosses and low iron fences. In 'Nature Walk No. 2' she names some of the cemetery trees: 'tall thin palms', olive trees, tamarisk trees, quandongs and eucalypts. I know from Lefevre's other writing and photography that she is a passionate and creative gardener, and sympathise entirely when she writes

The common names of our native shrubs and grasses are so beautiful, it is surprising that they are not more widely grown if only for the opportunity to say the names out loud on a regular basis: nodding chocolate lily and windmill grass, bottle-washer, silky blue-grass, pale rush, sea rush... (63)

Evocative passages like this are accompanied by Lefevre's own photographs of the cemetery, black-and-white pictures that illuminate the text and enrich the reader's experience of the quiet city.

Carol Lefevre is a gifted South Australian writer; we are lucky to have her here, to tell some of the many and varied stories that contribute to the history of our city and our state. At home, I have a selection of books that I gladly lend to friends who want to learn more about Adelaide. I have added *Quiet City* to this shelf, where it sits with Kerryn Goldsworthy's *Adelaide* (2011) and Barbara Hanrahan's *Scent of Eucalyptus* (1973). I can't wait to lend someone my copy.

Jennifer Osborn