

Comment re on-line Article by Ciara Jones ABC News on 72nd Anniversary of Betty Shanks' Murder

This 18-page article is written in an easy conversational style with a number of relevant photographs, all of which previously appeared in Ken Blanch's two editions (2006, 2012) or in Ted Duhs' three editions (2014, 2019, 2022). Most had been sourced originally from the State Library, the Courier Mail library, The Brisbane Tramway Museum, Queensland Archives, or from Eric Sterry's photograph album.

The content of the article as it discusses the murder and its unsolved status can only be described as elementary since the article adds nothing to what was publicly known about the murder and the police investigation at an early stage. Too many important developments are omitted. For instance, there is no mention that an ASIO recruitment officer was sent to Brisbane with the intention of recruiting Betty as a 'Q' source but arrived two days after she had been murdered. There is no mention of the very important statement in the ASIO file (see my third edition pp. 421-2) that says that Betty was in an intimate association with a married man who was a member of the Communist Part of Australia. Likewise, there is no mention of the police granting access to the Betty Shanks crime file to Doug and Noel Carter and what the brothers discovered in the crime file. If this is an introductory article it needs to be followed up later with one of more substance. Otherwise, the Betty Shanks' matter is not advanced.

Also, there are a number of errors in the article which should have been corrected before it was published. I mention a few below.

- Ciara Jones is confused about the two suburbs of The Grange and Wilston. Residents knew that Carberry Street was the border that separated The Grange from Wilston. So, Betty arrived at 9.32pm in The Grange tram, but she was killed in the backyard of the Hill's residence in Wilston. Betty lived with her parents in Montpelier Street in Wilston. Some of the residents who heard the two cries at about 9.38 pm or a bit later lived on The Grange side of Carberry Street (Mildren, Drews, and Daniels) but Marjorie Hill lived on the other side of Carberry Street in the suburb of Wilston. Others have made the same mistake but it is important to be accurate with location so the readers are not confused. (see the witnesses called to the 1953 inquest). Ciara Jones wrongly has Constable Alec Stewart living in 'the suburb of Grange', and quotes Jack Sim as saying "(Betty) was very close with her parents and younger brother, whom she lived with in Grange, near the boundary of the better-known suburb of Wilston." Jack hasn't checked his facts since Betty's home in Montpelier Street was more than 300 yards from the suburb of The Grange, as can be seen from Ross Keag's map on p.77 of my third edition.
- Milliken's given names were Edward Percival, not 'Edwin' as Ciara records. (see p. 5/18).
- Ciara says Betty's body was found by Constable Stewart at 5.30am. Actually, the milkman's young assistant was the first person to glimpse Betty's body. He went up the Hill's back steps to deliver the milk some minutes before 5.30 and he saw the body when he came back down the steps. It was not yet daylight. He told his boss, the milkman, and together they went next door and woke up Constable Stewart. Stewart then looked at Betty's body and called the police. Stewart didn't have a phone so he went next door and woke up Jim Coates and Stewart made the call from Jim Coates's phone. (see the map on p.77 of my third edition). I know this because I interviewed the milkman when I started writing about the case.
- Ciara says Eric Sterry was a former soldier (see p. 13/18). But Eric was not a soldier, he was an airman. He had joined the RAAF in 1943. Referring to Eric as a soldier is very misleading

because both Ken Blanch and Jack Sim believed that Betty was killed by a soldier. (see the photographs in Ken Blanch's 2012 book on p.37).

- Ciara refers to Eric Sterry as a 'local' locksmith. But Eric lived at Bowen Hills and he worked for the State Department of Public Works in Alice Street in the city. So, Eric wasn't a 'local'. This is important to note because on p. 15/18 Ciara writes, "Mr Sim said he was confident Betty was killed by a local, but believed it was a case of "wrong place, wrong time" or mistaken identity." There is no evidence at all to support this. If the murderer was a 'local' it is likely that he would have been picked up in the very extensive door-knock survey that the police carried out in the days following the murder. Eric Sterry escaped suspicion because he lived in Bowen Hills, a suburb some distance away. Note also, that Ciara refers to a 'local' doctor who committed suicide on the Sunday night of the weekend Betty was killed. (see p. 16/18). Ciara is clearly referring to Dr Donald Ashley Billing Carter. But Dr Carter lived in Ipswich. He also wasn't a 'local'.
- Ciara quotes Jack Sim as saying Betty must have been 'ambushed' because the killer would not have known that she would walk home down Thomas Street. (see p. 15/18). But the police believed that the man who made the strange phone call to Betty's workplace on the Wednesday was the murderer, and he was arranging to meet Betty on Friday at the terminus. *The Sunday Mail* reporter, Dick Falconer, worked this out. See *The Sunday Mail*, 5 October 1952. See also my third edition figure 45. Jack Sim's idea that Betty was 'ambushed' is unsupported by the facts. The facts suggest Betty was met at the terminus and walked trustingly down Thomas Street with someone she knew.
- Ciara mentions DNA evidence as if it will eventually solve the mystery. (see p.17/18). But the John Tonge scientists, Ron Grice and Barry Blair, who did the analysis of Betty's clothing when it was delivered to them in the year 2000, told the police that any DNA markers (if they existed) would probably not have come from the murderer but from contamination. Betty's clothing was used for a number of years after 1952 to dress the mannequin in the Police display at the Royal National show. Over the years the clothing was handled by many people. They would have left some of their DNA on the clothing. I deal with this in detail in my third edition.
- Lastly, Ciara quotes Desche Birtles saying "that the mark on Betty's forehead matched the soles of the leather boots he (Eric) was wearing". This is not quite right. Desche always said that Eric was wearing his brown brogues the night he met Betty at the terminus. Desche remembers taking those shoes to the shoe maker at Fortitude Valley and getting patterned rubber soles cut and glued to the soles of Eric's shoes. It is clear that the rectangular pattern of haemorrhage on Betty's forehead matches the patterned rubber soles. See the photos on p. 183 of my third edition. Desche came to one of my talks on Betty Shanks at the Police Museum and answered questions for about 30 minutes. One question related to how Desche polished her father's shoes. Desche said, "Mostly I used brown nugget, but if brown nugget wasn't available, I used black nugget". This was an important bit of information because at the autopsy, Betty's face and legs showed traces of black nugget.

I don't derive any pleasure from emphasizing the errors in Ciara's article, but after more than seventy years the Betty Shanks' case remains unsolved, and the reason is that the investigation in 1952 was slipshod, as was any re-investigation in later years. For instance, for 67 years the police believed that there were about 4,000 documents in the Betty Shanks' crime file. But an actual count by police in 2019 revealed that there were more than 20,000 documents in the file. If the file was 'active' as the police claim, surely someone would have become aware of this very large discrepancy. After my own unsuccessful attempt in 2018-9 to access the crime file, the police were forced to count the number

of documents. This discrepancy was made clear by Mr Bradshaw's letter on pp. 306-9 of my third edition.

So, the lesson to be learnt by all involved in the Betty Shanks' case, is that it is important to be careful to check any comment about the murder and the investigation. The first step in eventually solving this murder (if that is to occur) is to accept nothing without careful examination and appraisal. All assertions need to be tested. It is commendable that Ciara wrote the article because it focusses attention on a murder that urgently needs solving. But the errors need to be corrected.

There is enough new evidence to support re-opening the Betty Shanks' inquest. The Sharron Phillips inquest was recently re-opened in March 2021. A similar decision should be made in the Betty Shanks case. Since 1952, the Queensland police have spent at least \$55 million in today's dollars on this case with no positive result. If the current situation is allowed to drag on, that figure could rise.

Ted Duhs.

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