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Doomed love story wins film contract

LAUREN MITCHELL

A FORMER Bendigo journalist is on the brink of film success, with two Melbourne film companies optioning the rights to his family history with a twist. Ian Richardson spent ten years researching the bizarre case of his great aunt Florence Cox and in the process cast some long-awaited light on what he says was one of the most successful cover-ups in Australian church history.

He says he always intended for the story to be on the big screen, such is its significance in Australian social history, however it took writing a book to help get it over the film line.

Ian's self-published work, *God's Triangle*, was released last year.

"The need to give the film project extra momentum was definitely a prime reason for writing the book, but it also became clear that the film could tell only part of the extraordinary story and that there needed to be a book that recorded in detail what I had discovered and how I learned it," Ian says.

"The feedback about *God's Triangle* has been very heartening.

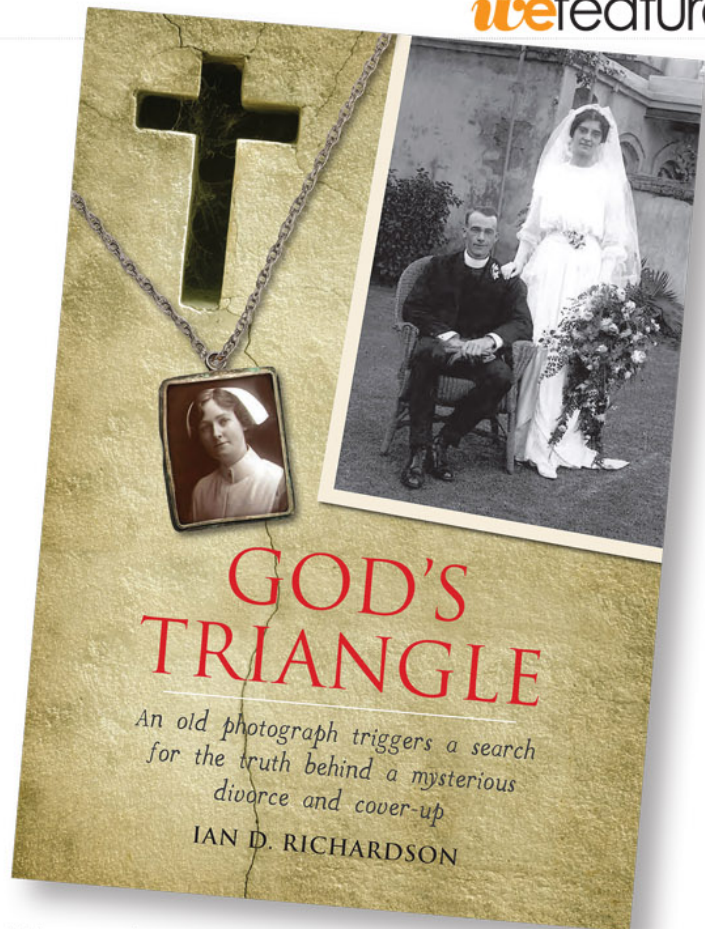
"I make some controversial assertions about religion and about the cover-up of the scandal, but the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, even from those who are religious and doubt my claims of a cover-up.

"One Cox family researcher in Sydney described the book as 'evil scribbblings', but as she hadn't read *God's Triangle*, I don't take that sort of thing seriously."

Fortunately for Ian, it's being taken very seriously by two successful film companies, Walker Films and Deep Rock Films, who have won financial support from Film Victoria for script development.

Ian says he is under no illusions as to how long the process ahead for the film is – with most of the story set in Bangladesh, it's going to require a large budget – but he has already proven he's in this project for the long haul.

"With very few exceptions, filmmaking is a long, long process and not at all as the general public imagines," he says.



"But I am now much cheered that Film Victoria has declared its support for the project by providing funding to take it on to the stage where the script is ready for shooting.

"Roslyn Walker of Walker Films has always been a keen supporter of the project, ever since I proposed it to her more than a decade ago.

"She has maintained her enthusiasm throughout the years, and without that support I might well have given up.

"Julie Marlow of Deep Rock Films is also one of Australia's most respected producers and I was thrilled when she came on board the project after reading the book.

"Both she and Roslyn have worked together over the years, so I am confident they will make a great production team."

Julie describes *God's Triangle* as a remarkable love story.

"It's a very, very strong love story and it's got a great setting," she says.

"It's going to be set in India, and it's got some great characters.

"My production partner, Roslyn Walker, and I saw the potential of a great Australian story with a good connection to India and in particular Bangladesh, which at the time of the story was East Bengal. It's a very rich landscape.

"It's on course and we're all hoping it will make a really great movie."

The story itself centres on Ian's great aunt and her failed marriage to a reverend while they were spreading god's word in East Bengal during World War I.

Their respective families and the church went to great lengths to cover up the reasons for the divorce, so much so that two Supreme Court judges ordered the

divorce file to be sealed for all time.

The story revealed itself to Ian, piece by painstakingly-found piece. For him, it was always a very personal crusade.

"Right from the start I guessed that I might find that Florrie Cox was an innocent party in the love triangle, but I didn't have the faintest clue why," he says.

"When I finally learned what had happened I felt an immense sadness for her and for the way she was treated by some members of her family and the church."

"As for her husband, the Reverend Frank Paice, my thoughts about him softened as the facts were slowly revealed. In some ways, he was also a victim of what proved to be most unusual circumstances."

Of course we won't spoil the story by revealing those circumstances here, but as Ian says, society still has a lot to learn from what happened to his Aunt Florrie.

"Oh yes, I think there is a lot to learn from *God's Triangle*, otherwise I wouldn't have bothered to write it," he says.

"Many people have romanticised views of life a century ago. They see it as a kind of Golden Age in which everyone was nice to everyone else and with a proper sense of community and Christian spirit, but it isn't true.

"The era was also marked by extraordinary bigotry, astonishing sexual ignorance, religious intolerance and racism.

"These still exist, of course, but in my view, it was much worse back then."

"I am thrilled to see that my book is opening the eyes of many people to a society that they had forgotten about, or didn't know existed.

Above all, I hope the book brings about a greater tolerance of people who are in varying ways different."

Ian grew up in Charlton, where he cut his journalistic teeth in the family business. His father owned the local paper.

He later worked in the radio newsroom at 3BO before moving to the UK, where he worked for more than 25 years with the BBC World Service radio and television.

His vision is to see *God's Triangle* premiered at Charlton's art deco Rex Theatre.

"The Rex is where I developed my life-long enthusiasm for the cinema," he says.

"Saturday night at the 'flicks' was the social highlight of the week for me, my brother, Jeffrey, and sisters, Ruth and Alison – even though some of the films were terrible rubbish.

"The projectors at the Rex back then were in a dreadful state of repair and would often break down, or a film would jam in the middle of a reel, but it was all part of the fun.

"Occasionally, I was allowed to sneak into the projection room to watch a film being run and I found that very exciting."

Ian travelled back to Charlton over Easter this year for the 150th anniversary of the town.

"I was immensely proud to see the Rex fully operational again after the disastrous floods of January 2011," he says.

"It is now one of the best equipped purpose-built cinemas outside the metropolitan area."

■ If you can't wait for Ian's book to be made into a film, you can buy a copy at www.godstriangle.com



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