

RITA CATHERINE GENLLOUD  
1896–1979

Apart from *By-Ways in Old Cambridge*, her well-loved book, Rita Genlloud left little trace. There is just one other artwork—a watercolour of a pavilion in South Africa—and the normal set of public records, mostly mundane, though in one case tragic. But that is the sum of it.

She was born in Stapleford in 1896, the second of three children. Her father Albert was a railway engineer with the Great Eastern Railway. It was a railway family: her grandfather had been Secretary of the company, and her brother, Frederick, started an engineering apprenticeship with them. Her mother, Florence, was an amateur water-colourist. The family moved into Cambridge soon after Rita's birth, and finally settled in Hills Road.

Frederick was sent to The Perse School, an institution of some repute, but Rita's education was rather more modest: not Perse Girls, but Eden Street School, a 'Higher-Grade Girls School' run by the Old School Trust in a working class part of town. There are no records, other than that she received a prize for needlework in 1909. By 1911 she had left school, and was living at home without obvious employment.

Around the outbreak of the First World War, the family moved to 1 Fitzwilliam Road, south of the Botanic Gardens, a house they would keep for the next sixteen years. They had, by the relevant standards, a good war. Frederick left the railways and joined up as a despatch rider with the Royal Engineers in France, before being dismissed for incompetence. He ended up as a navigator in the Royal Flying Corps, coming through the war unscathed. He left home to get married in 1918, and with his wife and daughter subsequently emigrated to Australia. Rita is not recorded as having done any war work. It is very possible that she was at art college—her work certainly suggests more serious training than Eden Street School would have offered—but there is no record of that either. Late in the war she did, however, meet a South African who was training in Cambridge in an Office Cadet Battalion.

Cyril Webster was born in Kimberley in 1890, and grew up in the Eastern Cape in a family of Scottish origin. At the outbreak of war he was working as a manager for a wool and hide dealer, but left to join the South African Infantry, seeing service during the 1914 Boer rebellion, and then in the conflicts in South West Africa and East Africa. In July 1917 he left to come to England to try for a 'temporary' commission in the Black Watch. With a letter of recommendation from South Africa House he was accepted, and enrolled on the four and a half month Cadet Scheme, starting in October 1917. By this point the British Army was running badly short of officers, and the Cadet Scheme was designed as a way by which men who would not normally have been considered as office material could be rapidly brought up to scratch. It was as much a social education as a military one. Colonials

like Cyril were sent to battalions based in Oxford or Cambridge — the colleges were almost empty of students and were keen to take on the task. Cyril was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, based in Pembroke. The commanding officer was H.J. Edwards, formerly the senior tutor at Peterhouse. (Jim Ede, future owner of the Kettle's Yard house that Rita was to draw, had just finished as an instructor in the 5th Battalion at Trinity.) There was rudimentary military training, but much of the time was spent playing sports and socialising; a crash course in being a gentleman. Cyril must have had time to meet Rita.

Cyril didn't do particular well; Edwards' final report said tersely: 'Somewhat inclined to be slack — must try harder'. But he did well enough to get his commission in the 9th Battalion of the Black Watch. The battalion had been so depleted that it had been brought back to the UK to rebuild. Cyril finally went out to France in July 1918; it is unclear whether he saw any fighting. By early 1919, still in France but applying for leave, he was listing his UK address as Fitzwilliam Road.

In April 1919 Rita and Cyril married at St Paul's Church in Hills Road: Rita's local church but one, as she must have known, most famous as the first target of the Camden Society for its unhistorical mishmash of gothic architecture. In July Cyril left his commission, and by October he and Rita had moved to South Africa, to East London, Cyril's hometown, where he resumed his work as a trader in wool and hides. It was in South Africa, that Rita's one known watercolour was completed. It is of a pavilion in Johannesburg Zoo, and of the artillery memorial in front of it, complete with howitzer brought from Flanders in 1921. So the picture must have been completed some time after that. Rita's uncle, William Genlloud, was living in Maraisburg, then a small town some eight miles west of the zoo, so her presence there is unsurprising. And given her husband's war service, the subject is unsurprising too.

The marriage ended, however, in tragedy. In September 1926 Cyril committed suicide, alone in the hotel room in Durban where he had been living. The coroner's report gives the cause of death as Lysol poisoning. He was 35. Rita was already back with her family in Cambridge; it is unclear when she had returned. From Cambridge she authorized Cyril's brother to act for her in the settlement of the estate. Cyril's total assets were valued at £9 11s 6d. That was less than his debts, which included cash borrowed from various co-workers in the wool and hide trade; but, despite the suicide, he had a life insurance policy that paid out. Rita inherited £107 10s 6d.

So Rita was back in the familiar streets of Cambridge. It was while she was living with her family in Fitzwilliam Road, between her return from South Africa and the family's move to Chesterton in 1930, that she completed the eighteen illustrations for *By-Ways in Old Cambridge*. They were published in 1933 by Galloway and Porter, the bookseller in Sidney Street. Rita contributed a short text for each (with the exception of that for Blackmoor Head Yard, written by one J.H.B.). Arthur Gray, Master of Jesus College, best known for his ghost stories, wrote a somewhat tangential introduction; it is clear that he knew nothing of the author.

*By-Ways in Old Cambridge*. was Rita's only publication. She subsequently had studios in various places in central Cambridge—Peas Hill, St Andrew's Hill, Hobson Street—but there is no record of any further artwork.

In 1930 the family moved to Stretton Avenue in Chesterton. Rita's father died in 1933, and, with her mother and younger sister Ina, she moved to various houses in Cambridge, ending up in Cherry Hinton. She worked organising the ARP—the air-raid wardens—during the Second World War. Her mother died in 1943.

In 1947, with both their parents dead, and with their brother living in Australia, Rita and Ina moved to the Sussex coast: living first in Peacehaven, then, moving progressively westward, Rottingdean, and finally Brighton. They lived together until Rita's death in Brighton in 1979.

Richard Holton