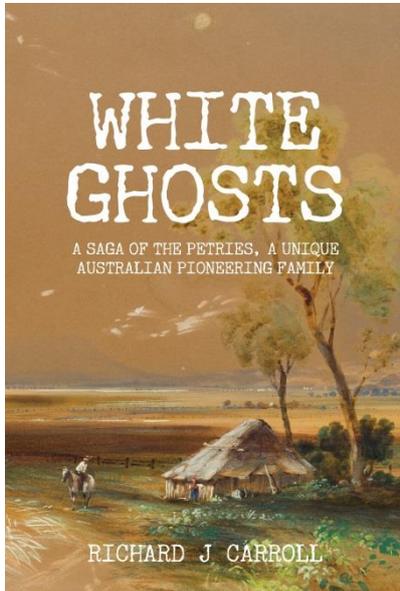


WHITE GHOSTS by Richard Carroll

A review by Tony Cole



I have just finished reading this book by a local writer and I am happy to say that I enjoyed it enormously, and also that it gave me a lot of food for thought about how the European occupation of this country was managed and Queensland came to be the place it is.

At its root, this is an historical fiction based on the lives of a real local family, the Petrie family, but as they were a very significant part of the history of this part of Queensland and were also very closely involved with the aboriginal people of the area, it is also a history of Queensland, and more significantly, Brisbane.

The story is told through the experiences of a rich cast of characters starting with the first convicts to be sent here until the end of the first world war, so it is a huge canvas that Richard uses, and in fact it is a pretty large book as well. But he manages his story remarkably well, and it remains spellbinding right up to the last page and our sympathies with the various characters, both European and aboriginal, remain to the very end.

The characterisation of these people, mostly actually real people, is intriguing and for my part, I found that I cared about them all, both evil and “normal”, to the end of the book, and as an Englishman who obviously didn’t grow up in Australia, it gave me a much better insight into why things are as they are here - so a useful book on a number of fronts.

It deals unflinchingly with the horrible way that both the convicts and the aboriginals were treated by their masters, and gave me a much better understanding of the horrors of both colonialism and the idea that you can create a functioning country by means of convicting your poorest people and sending them there.

Altogether an intriguing and highly readable book, that held my attention till the very last page, and left me in a thoughtful state as I mulled over in my mind the many points it made about the events that happened here over the last couple of hundred years.

So I can recommend it unreservedly as an enjoyable read, a way to discover a large chunk of local history and to give you a better understanding of the relationships which we all have with the land and each other.

White Ghosts is a book that should be read and thought about by everyone in Oz.