



Hidden away in Anderson's Bay Cemetery at Block 93 Plot 135 is a grave that is only identified (by searching) with a nameplate at the foot of the concrete surrounds: the word "WARD" in capitals.

The casual visitor would not realise this is the grave of Frances Ellen Talbot, a woman who most of her life used her nom-de-plume of Thorpe Talbot and was a prize-winning Victorian novelist. She had also been recognised as the mistress of the colourful Judge Dudley Ward, a relationship over several decades, and she became his second wife late in both their lives.

Thorpe Talbot was born on 20 November 1850 in Horton, in Bradford, Yorkshire, England. Her mother was Ellen Talbot, a "milliner and straw bonnet maker" according to the 1851 British census. The father James Talbot was a hairdresser.

In 1854 the three-year-old child and her 24-year-old mother both travelled to Melbourne, Australia on the *Albatross*, with 338 other passengers on the sailing ship. Facts are hazy about why they emigrated or why the father was not with them. What is known is that the daughter was later alone in New Zealand as a teenager.

Perusal of shipping passenger lists shows "Ellen Talbot" arriving at Hokitika (then one of New Zealand's busiest ports) in 1867 on the early iron screw steamer *Otago* from Melbourne. She would have been 16, but was listed as 19 years old. There is no other Talbot listed as arriving in New Zealand from Australia in the late 1860s or '70s and her poems written in the late 1870s were signed as having been written in Christchurch.

Thorpe Talbot became famous in Australia and New Zealand in 1881 when her *Philiberta* won the Melbourne newspaper *Leader's* novel-writing competition with a prize of £100 — a princely sum in those days — and it was published as a popular newspaper serial. Even more fortunate for the young woman the novel

was taken up by Ward, Lock the London publishers for international release and became listed on its "Select Library of Fiction" along with books by Dickens, Trollope, Mark Twain and Mrs Beeton. Her novel sold in England, the US, and the colonies.

Philiberta's plot traverses between Australia and New Zealand and could be partly autobiographical, suggesting some theories about Thorpe Talbot's early years and education in Australia.

Before *Philiberta* she had written the novella *Blue Cap*, which was published in New Zealand in 1880 as *White Hood and Blue Cap*, combining with Vincent Pyke's story *White Hood*. She also wrote a number of short stories and poems that were published in newspapers in Australia and New Zealand.

Talbot was one of the earliest of New Zealand's travel writers, famous for her *The New Guide to the Lakes and Hot Springs* (1882) published by Wilson and Horton, Auckland, Coupled with this guidebook was a more sardonic critique of her tour called *A Month In Hot Water* which showed the journalist to have a lively and unusually independent view of the travel industry, During the 1880s she also visited California in the US and wrote a series of articles, again for Antipodean newspapers.

For some time a "lost novel" *Guinevere* has been credited to the writer. This has only recently been rediscovered as an epic poem of 59 seven-line stanzas with the longer title of *Guinevere in the South*. Both in *Blue Cap* and *Philiberta* Talbot inserted obvious references to Judge Ward, and the long poem's theme of "sweet mad bliss" also seems a reflection of her place in a human "triangle."

When Judge Ward's first wife Anne, famous as the first national president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in New Zealand, died in 1896, Dudley Ward took over the legal ownership of a house in Maori Hill where Talbot had lived for a number of years. In 1902 the couple were married in the house; he was then aged 74 and she was 51.

After Judge Ward's death in 1913 Thorpe Talbot had regular payments from his estate but was forced to move out of the Maori Hill house. She lived in addresses in Kaikorai and Roslyn in apparently poor circumstances and bad health in spite of her income. She died in Chalet Hospital on 12 March 1923 of "acute nephritis," [kidney disease]

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from information supplied by Geoff Adams of Dunedin from his forthcoming book "*Judge Ward*," by Geoff Adams (Amazon Books).