

## THE BALLROOM MURDER

### LEIGH STRAW

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

In August 1925, Audrey Jacob shot dead her former fiancé, Cyril Gidley, in full view of hundreds of guests at a charity ball in Perth's Government House. When she was arrested, she still held the gun in her hand. It was a clear case of wilful murder – that is until prosecutor Arthur Haynes was assigned to Jacob's defence. His ability to play the press and the jury for sympathy led to a sensational result.

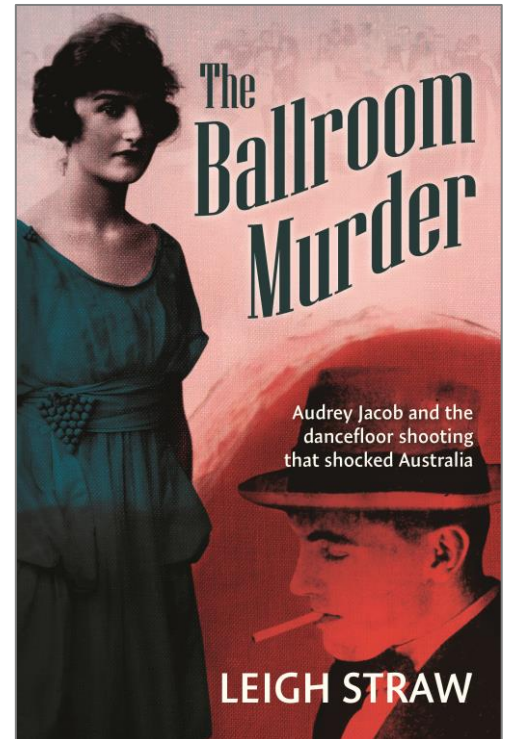
*The Ballroom Murder* is a true crime story rich with first-hand newspaper accounts from the day, and demonstrates the power of the press and privilege in an extraordinary judicial outcome.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Straw is an academic, historian and writer. She is the author of true crime biographies of Australian crime figures Kate Leigh and Dulcie Markham, and Australia's first female detective, Lillian Armfield. Leigh was the joint winner of the 2018 Margaret Medcalf Award for her book *After the War: Returned Soldiers and the Mental and Physical Scars of World War I*. Leigh Straw is Associate Professor of History at The University of Notre Dame Australia.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the available information, what kind of person was Audrey Jacob?
2. What kind of a person was Cyril Gidley?
3. What are your impressions of the style of reporting in the papers of the day?
4. Why do you think this style of reporting was prevalent at the time?
5. Does it bear any comparison to any form of media reporting today?
6. What attitudes towards women are evident in the nature of the reporting of this case?
7. Do you think that reporting has changed much since then?
8. Why do you think that this trial had the outcome it did?
9. Would it have made a difference to the outcome if the genders of victim and perpetrator were reversed?
10. Would it have made a difference if Audrey had been a woman of colour – or if the shooting had taken place outside this well-heeled society setting?
11. What was the role of Audrey's defence in this trial, both within and outside the courtroom?
12. Why do you think that Arthur Haynes' strategies were successful?
13. Do you think they would lead to a similar result if this case were tried today?
14. What do you think the prosecution might have done differently?
15. What do you think we can learn from re-examining these historical trials?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***How did you discover this story and what drew you to write a book about it?***

I discovered the story a few years ago when I was going through newspapers that were still on microfilm in the State Library of WA. The headline popped up about a ballroom shooting in Perth and I was gripped. I then went through archival material in the State Records Office and found out more about the specifics of the case, particularly in the inquest records and material in police files. The story was always there in my mind as I researched and wrote other books about women and crime, so it was just a matter of time before I came back to the Jacob story.

### ***What was the most unexpected or surprising thing you learned in the course of your research?***

The most surprising thing I learned was that Audrey's mother went to see a female police officer in Fremantle because she was concerned about her daughter's social life and her meeting older men on the ships that docked in the port. You get the impression from the police statement of this meeting that Audrey was a bit of a handful for her parents but that's certainly not the portrayal of Audrey in court, even in her parents' testimonies.

### ***Do you think that Audrey Jacob was fortunate in her choice of lawyer (and that Cyril Gidley could have had a better one)?***

I think Audrey certainly benefited from Arthur Haynes's experience and newspaper connections. The prosecution underestimated how convincing Haynes could be, and you can't really blame them as it really looked like an open-and-shut case.

### ***What would you have liked to learn or discover that your research did not tell you?***

I would have liked to have learned more about Audrey and Cyril from their own personal records and not just what was presented in the case. Though these records may not exist, diaries, letters and other personal material might have given me more insights into their characters and their relationship.