

## Edeowie

*Jane Turner Goldsmith*

It feels ancient here. Those ranges in the distance are more than 800 million years old, the crumbled stones of the hotel under my feet, a youthful 150. I pick over thick glass-bottomed bases of old beer bottles and bits of rusted iron. Edeowie is a ghost town now, its residents fled or perished from the droughts that cursed the settlements built ‘beyond the Goyder Line’, where land was deemed ‘liable to drought’. In 1865 there was good rainfall and settlers came, brimming with hope. They planted, grazed, lived their hardy lives. Built a Post Office, a General Store, stables, houses; the population swelled to some 300 people. The hotel was the perfect watering stop for drovers on the bullock run, bringing copper from the mines far north. There’s a plaque commemorating a wedding here: August, 1873. Imagine the dancing under the vast night sky, smashed with the milky stars of the southern hemisphere.

But fortunes rose and fell in Edeowie. The temperature could hit fifty degrees in the shade. Babies died from ‘distress and want of water’, men from ‘apoplexy’. Bleached corpses were found in creek beds.

It is the story of John McNeil and his dog that best epitomises the tragic deceptions for those early pioneers. Seeking to drink from the well, the dog fell in. John jumped in to save him but couldn’t climb out. He drowned in three feet of water.

For the love of his dog; no one to pull him out.

I breathe in red dust, burn under the late afternoon sun, watch the laboured industry of ants on the rubbly, cracked earth. Feel sorrow for John and his dog and the sheep thirsting and dying.

How could there *ever* have been enough water?

**Jane Turner Goldsmith**’s first novel *Poinciana*, Wakefield Press 2006, was shortlisted for a Commonwealth Prize. She has published a junior novel, a non-fiction anthology of adoption stories, short stories, poetry, flash pieces and articles, most recently in *Overland*, 2021. She is currently undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide.