

## How the other half lives – and dies

### AN ACT OF KINDNESS

Barbara Nadel  
Quercus

A young Asian couple moves into a dilapidated house in London. Nasreen Khan is pregnant and spends much of her time working alone on the house, her strict Muslim husband Abdullah seemingly preoccupied with his job as a lawyer.

Nasreen had been sanding the front door frame when she found a paint-encrusted lump. About the size of a lipstick, it was attached by rusty screws. Behind it was a black and white photograph of a woman, her eyes filled with pain or fear. Which was it? And why was the strange capsule inscribed with a Star of David?

In the first hint that theirs is not an equal or trusting relationship, Nasreen keeps her find from her husband.

In the rear of the Khan's garden, in a dense tangle of trees, ex-soldier John Sawyer has dosed down in an old shack. Over the back wall is the Jewish cemetery.

Nasreen's cousin had also fought in Afghanistan. He'd lost an eye and his faith and was hiding from his nightmares in drug abuse. Perhaps that was why she struck up an unlikely friendship with the tall, scruffy man, his hair and beard hanging in long brown hanks, his eyes mostly empty.

She is too fearful to tell her husband about the man who lives in the bottom of their garden. When his body is discovered in the cemetery, Nasreen's suspicions light upon Abdullah. Did he find out they were friends? Did his jealousy lead him to murder? Reluctant to go to the police, Nasreen reaches out to the Arnold Detective Agency, run by ex-cop Lee Arnold and his partner, Mumtaz Hakim, a devout Muslim widow. Mumtaz is herself being terrorised by

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a brutal criminal gang forcing her to repay her late husband's huge debts. Ahmet had beaten and raped both his wife and daughter before delivering them into the hands of the rapacious moneylender and property developer Naz Sheikh.

As Mumtaz Hakim begins to dig into Abdullah's past, she finds both Nasreen's husband and her new home

are not what they seem.

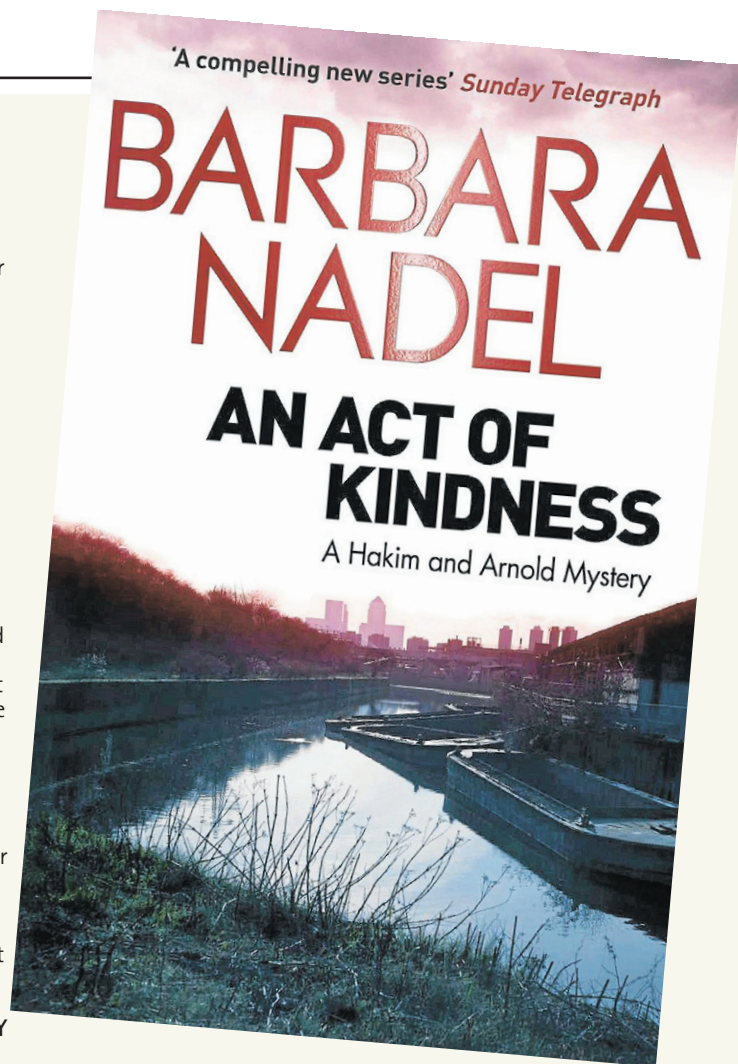
An Act of Kindness is set in the East End, "where the sky is as grey as a sewer rat's tail" in the run up to the Olympics. It paints a grim picture of women trapped and persecuted by their husbands and local criminal gangs. Already a fan of Nadel's Ikmen series, set in Istanbul, I found her new series harrowing for its sexual violence.

Barbara Nadel has broken her usual silence about her books, saying An Act of Kindness is not some kind of preachy tract.

"Slum landlordism and organised crime have always been close but now we can also observe other associations with people trafficking, prostitution and drugs. A lot of the victims are illegal immigrants or refugees desperate to get away from repressive regimes that make their lives impossible. But a lot of them are also the indigenous poor – single mothers, the mentally ill, the physically ill and poor sods who just can't get a job. Our government stigmatises such people, their 'failure' being deemed their own fault. And, albeit indirectly, they can push them into the arms of slum landlords who are also gangsters."

Some horrible things happen in An Act of Kindness, Nadel admits. And she's right.

BARBARA FARRELLY



### ASSASSIN'S CREED: FORSAKEN

Oliver Bowden  
Penguin Australia

The latest instalment of the Assassin's Creed series certainly didn't disappoint. Anyone who has read Oliver Bowden's series has followed the journey of Ezio Auditore as he has taken part and led the battle between The Assassins and the Templars for control.

In the previous four books we have been largely treated to The Assassins' side of the story.

Ezio featured strongly, eventually finishing up as the master assassin, but we have also been witness to the leadership and ultimate betrayal by former leader Altair.

In this latest book, Forsaken, we have fast forwarded to 1735 and for the first time we are really treated to the Templars' side of the story.

Through the eyes of Haytham Kenway we are taken on a fascinating journey from England through to the US, where he meets the likes of George Washington and is witness to the Boston Tea Party.

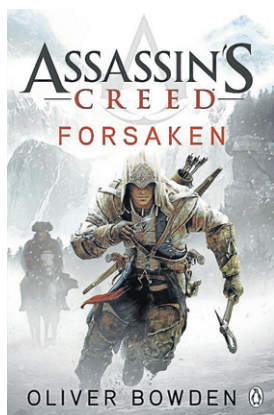
Intermingled with the story, in which Kenway's family is attacked, his father killed and sister taken, is the brutal battle during the Indian wars.

Consumed with a need for revenge, Kenway becomes a deadly killer.

And while not wanting to give too much away, there is an interesting and surprising twist at the end, but you'll have to read Forsaken to find that out.

Author Oliver Bowden has again taken us on a superb journey in this superb series and I for one can't wait for the next instalment.

ROBERT CRAWFORD



### A HISTORY OF STATE OF ORIGIN

Will Evans  
Slattery Media Group

Who would have thought that State of Origin Rugby League, when it was first introduced in 1980, would go on to be the phenomena that it is today?

Back in 1980 it was hoped the introduction of the series would be the saviour of the then floundering interstate clashes between NSW and Queensland.

Prior to that players were required to represent the state in which they were playing football, and with the rich Sydney clubs luring many of the Queensland stars to the big city the Blues' teams were being bolstered by expatriate Maroons and the score lines were blowing out.

A one-off game in 1980 allowed players to represent their home state. Billed as mate against mate, no one took that further than the great Arthur Beetson, who at 35, made his long-awaited debut for Queensland, captaining his beloved Maroons in that first Origin clash.

History shows the Queenslanders won that first clash 20-10 but it was Beetson's high shot on his then Parramatta team-mate Mick Cronin that was the talking point.

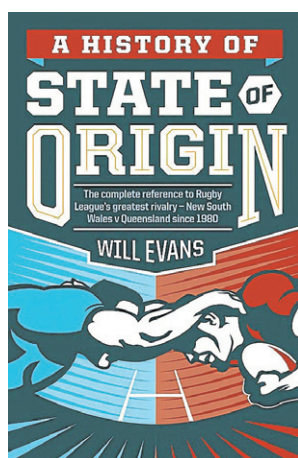
It wasn't until 1982 that the full blown three match series was staged for the first time.

Now 33 years on and 99 matches later it is one of the biggest sporting events in Australia.

Providing a blow by blow account of each of the 99 games, Will Evans' book profiles the 442 origin players, coaches and referees that have featured in the series' history.

Evans has even stuck his neck out and selected a greatest Origin line-up for both states and that alone makes for some interesting reading.

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### PARDON ME FOR MENTIONING...

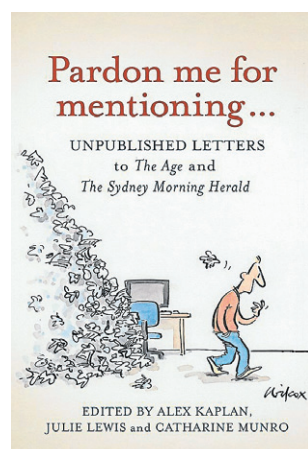
Alex Kaplan, Julie Lewis, Catherine Munro  
Allen & Unwin

More than 2000 letters to the editor are sent to the Sydney Morning Herald each week. Competition for publication is tough and you might think all the entertaining ones might end up in print. This book is proof that they don't.

For reasons of timeliness, vulgarity or the writer's own proliferation (only one per week or two per month per person make it into print) hundreds fail to see the light of day. It's very satisfying to see in the age of social media when tweeting and online comments often take the edge of readers' reaction, that people still want to see their comments published. Of course, they are read by more people this way too.

This collection is fairly topical with subjects ranging from gender wars to politics to crimes against the English language. On marriage equality being a slippery slope, Max Fischer of Scarborough writes that he proposed to his dog Lucy and was rejected; "She said marrying someone of limited intelligence was beneath her." On Julian Assange's being cooped up in the Ecuadorian embassy, Heath Roberts of Killara offers a foolproof escape plan. It involves around 200 supporters dressing up as their hero, converging on the embassy along with the staging of a truck accident involving the release of hundreds of chickens and Assange escaping in the ensuing bedlam. Sounds foolproof to me. While out of left field a Culburra Beach reader writes that the "best cure for hiccups is a shot of grenadine".

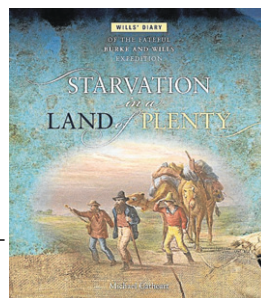
FRANCES RAND



### STARVATION IN A LAND OF PLenty

Michael Cathcart  
National Library of Australia

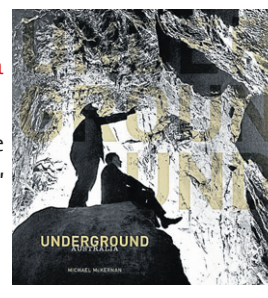
In 1860 Robert Burke and William Wills set out to cross Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria and back. They got there, but never returned. While history has entwined the explorers' names together, Wills was not the second-in-command but the party's "surveyor, astronomical and meteorological observer". It was Burke's duty as leader to keep an expedition diary, but he failed to, just as he did in many other aspects. Among the expedition's 20-tonnes of equipment was an oak and cedar table and stools for Burke and deputy leader George Landells to dine each evening. There was also a Chinese gong and an enormous bath. It was eventually Burke's poor leadership and Wills' unfailing loyalty that caused the men to starve to death in the bountiful lands of the Yandruwandha. Extracts from Wills' diary and evidence from a descendant of the local Aborigines show that things could have turned out very differently for the two explorers.



### UNDERGROUND AUSTRALIA

Michael McKernan  
National Library of Australia

Everyone lived above ground in Australia, until white settlement. Historian Michael McKernan supposes it may have been cheaper to burrow than build accommodation for convicts. Or it may have been more terrifying. On Norfolk Island convicts were lowered through a trapdoor into cells with metre-thick stone walls and no doors or windows. Convict labourers often worked underground too - quarrying sandstone and digging coal. Their hardships helped create modern Australia. Underground Australia is a place mostly of work, but also for transport, waste disposal, tourism and, in the case of Coober Pedy, living. Illustrated by images from some of Australia's best-known photographers, including Frank Hurley, Jeff Carter and Wolfgang Sievers, this book offers an insight into a part of the country we rarely see.



Be seen in Scene

To have your event included in the South Coast Register's entertainment guide please contact Frances Rand by 5pm Wednesday prior to publication. Call 4421 9123 or email frances.rand@fairfaxmedia.com.au