

BOOKS

SLEAZY SYDNEY

A police informer spills the beans on Kings Cross, writes JOHN MACLEAY.

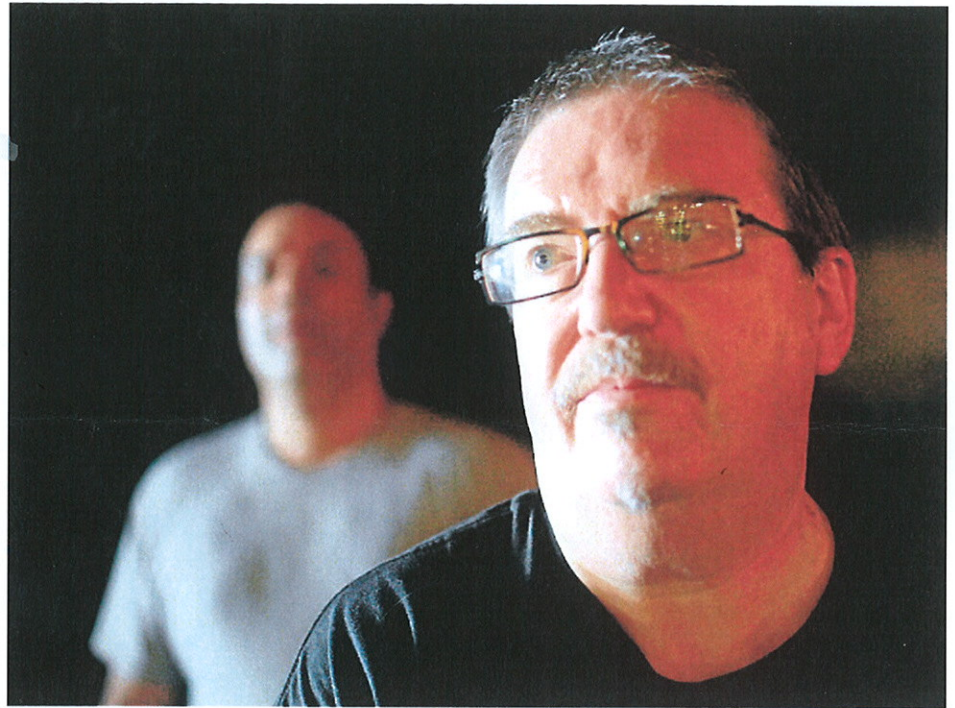
For many Sydneysiders, the name Kings Cross denotes an image of a sleazy underbelly. The inner-city suburb is also home to several thousand residents, is prime metropolitan real estate and is prone to invasion by backpackers and jobs on the prowl amid the massage parlours and brothels.

Author, screenwriter and former journalist Jimmy Thomson, a Kings Cross resident of many years, dwells on its seedier past in his book about its crims and crooked cops in the period before and during the Wood Royal Commission of the mid 1990s.

The royal commission exposed police corruption and subsequently led to a wholesale change in policing culture in the state.

The book, *Snitch*, is told from the perspective of a young man of Lebanese heritage from Sydney's west who fell into the underworld scene in the late 1980s, making friends and trading information with both the police and criminals. He was a police informer for 10 years and lived to tell the tale.

The man whom Thomson befriended and dubs "the Inspector" is now a technical adviser for the third *Underbelly* series, *The Golden Mile*, which is set in Kings Cross and is being broadcast on the Nine Network.



TELL-ALL: Jimmy Thomson with the Inspector (obscured) in the background.

From humble beginnings working in a menswear store for \$200 a week, the Inspector entered the Kings Cross scene as a doorman and bouncer at a strip club, his wage skyrocketing to around \$3000 a week.

"Kings Cross still had its magic back then," the Inspector says in the book.

"The Pink Pussycat, the Pink Panther, Les Girls and the Bourbon and Beefsteak – that was the Cross. There were plenty of other places but without these four there was nothing."

Kings Cross back then attracted the best and the worst of both sides of the law.

"It's life in the street, as shown from the perspective of a foot soldier, if you will," says Thomson of *Snitch*.

He says there are good cops and bad cops, just like there are good crims and bad crims. Everything is a shade of grey.

"The Inspector survived because he was a likeable sort of bloke who could trade information with both sides," Thomson says.

The Inspector says he never traded drugs and didn't like them because of how they affected him. His vice was gambling. He'd make huge amounts of money only to lose it again just as quickly.

"His life was a roll of the dice," Thomson says.

On one occasion, for instance, the Inspector was on the verge of being severely beaten or even killed by rivals in nearby Rushcutters Bay Park when a police car happened to cruise by and ask what was happening.

The book is full of juicy and controversial titbits that the Inspector swears are true, including a salacious one about the late stockbroker Rene Rivkin and his then employee Gordon Wood, who was later convicted of throwing his girlfriend Caroline Wood off the Gap.

Thomson says he was in two minds about including that snippet but the Inspector insisted.

Snitch, Allen & Unwin, \$24.99

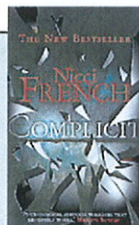
AAP

ON THE SHELF

COMPLICIT
Nicci French
Penguin
\$32.95

This is one unusual book. As it starts out, Bonnie Graham, a local school music teacher, is standing alone in her friend's flat with the body of a man who has been murdered. When she calls a friend to help her dispose of the corpse, we are still not sure if she is the guilty party. There are many twists to this tale before we discover the truth. Great read.

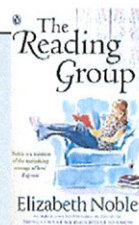
Greg French



THE READING GROUP
Elizabeth Noble
Penguin, \$24.95

A book about a book club. It's a cute concept for a story about the intersecting tales of five women who meet at a weekly reading group. They include unhappy wives, best friends, single mums, quiet observers and carefree characters who discover a little about literature and a lot about themselves. The author takes inspiration from Roddy Doyle and Ian McEwan.

Jacqui Jones



MEGS AND THE WONDER STRIKE
Neil Montagna
with Mark Schwarzer
Bounce Books
\$14.99

This is the fifth instalment in a great series written with the help of Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer. This time, Megs, an English immigrant to Australia who loves his football (soccer), and two of his teammates have made it into the NSW team. I would recommend the book for kids aged from nine to 13.

Sam Winder, 11



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