

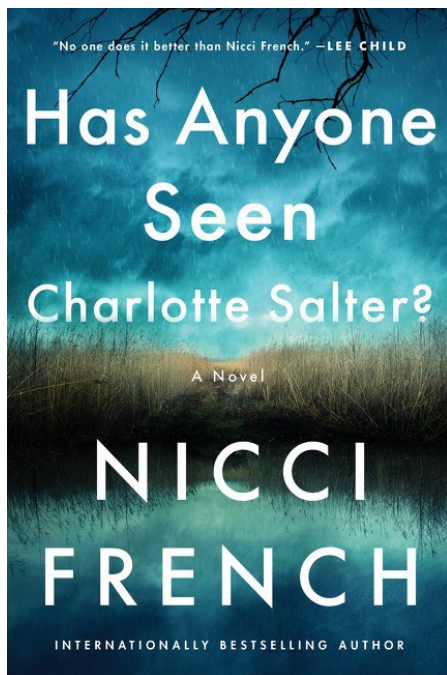
Book Reviews

- *Has Anyone Seen Charlotte Salter?* / Nicci French Fiction 2024
- *Bennelong & Phillip : a history unravelled* / Kate Fullagar Non Fiction 2024

Has Anyone Seen Charlotte Salter? / Nicci French

<https://fictionophile.com/>

Fiction 2024



SYNOPSIS

1990. When beautiful and vivacious Charlotte Salter fails to turn up to her husband Alec's 50th birthday party, her kids are worried, but Alec is not. As the days pass and there's still no word from Charlie, her daughter, ETTY, and her sons, Niall, Paul and Ollie, all struggle to come to terms with her disappearance. How can anyone just vanish without a trace? Left with no answers and in limbo, the Salter children try and go on with their lives, all the while thinking that their mother's killer is potentially very close to home.

Now. After years away, ETTY returns home to the small East Anglian village where she grew up, to help move her father into a care home. Now in his eighties, Alec has dementia and often mistakes his daughter for her mother. ETTY is a changed woman from the trouble-free girl she was when Charlie was still around - all the Salter children have spent decades running and hiding from their mother's disappearance.

But when their childhood friends, Greg and Morgen Ackerley, decide to do a podcast about Charlotte's disappearance, it seems like the town's buried secrets - and the Salters' - might finally come to light. After all this time, will they finally find out what really happened to Charlotte Salter?

REVIEW

Niall Salter is the only one of the siblings to stay in the area. He married and took over the family's landscaping business.

Paul Salter, deeply affected by his mother's disappearance, took his own life five years after she was last seen...

Oliver Salter is the artistic one. He too left the area for pastures new.

ETTY Salter, the youngest of the family, is despondent and grieving her mother. As soon as she is old enough she leaves East Anglia and goes to London where she ends up working as a lawyer.

Set in Suffolk, East Anglia, this novel has a very atmospheric tone. December's chill on the marshes... the old house near the river...

The Salter family are readying themselves to celebrate the father's fiftieth birthday on December 23rd. When the mother of the family doesn't turn up to the party, it begins a years long search for closure by her four children. She was kind, vivacious, warm, loving, and desperately missed by all – with the possible exception of her unfaithful husband.

With the Christmas season, coupled with police incompetence/corruption, Charlotte's disappearance is not investigated as thoroughly as it should have been. On Christmas Day, the Salter's neighbour and friend Duncan Ackerley is found dead in the river.

Jump ahead three decades. One of the Ackerley brothers decides to make a podcast about the two cases.

The remaining Salter siblings return to the house to clear it out. Their father is suffering from dementia and needs to move to a care home. Since they are home again, they are all interviewed in the podcast bringing back unwanted memories of that fateful December... The Salters hire a woman named Bridget Wolfe to help clear out their family home. When Bridget is murdered, the case comes to the attention of Scotland Yard. A female policewoman, Detective Inspector Maud O'Connor is sent to Suffolk to investigate. Young, intelligent, and sharp, Maud quickly realizes that the current case is intrinsically linked to the two cases from 1990.

If there is a star of the novel, for me it was Detective Inspector Maud O'Connor. If the authors decide to feature her in future books, I will be first in line to read them.

A steadily paced domestic thriller/police procedural that kept me engrossed throughout, *Has Anyone Seen Charlotte Salter?* is another superbly written novel by the writing team of Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. Suspenseful, poignant, atmospheric and twisty, the story has themes of loss, sibling relationships, dark secrets, murder and deception.

Highly recommended!

Book Review

Bennelong & Phillip : a history unravelled / Kate Fullagar

Non Fiction 2024



SYNOPSIS

Bennelong and Phillip were leaders of their two sides in the first encounters between Britain and Indigenous Australians, Phillip the colony's first governor, and Bennelong the Yiyura leader. The pair have come to represent the conflict that flared and has never settled.

Fullagar's account is also the first full biography of Bennelong of any kind and it challenges many misconceptions, among them that he became alienated from his people and that Phillip was a paragon of Enlightenment benevolence. It tells the story of the men's marriages, including Bennelong's best-known wife, Barangaroo, and Phillip's unusual domestic arrangements, and places the period in the context of the Aboriginal world and the demands of empire.

To present this history afresh, *Bennelong & Phillip* relates events in reverse, moving beyond the limitations of typical Western ways of writing about the past, which have long privileged the coloniser over the colonised. Bennelong's world was hardly linear at all, and in Fullagar's approach his and Phillip's histories now share an equally unfamiliar framing..

REVIEW (Follow link for full article)

<https://theconversation.com/>

Anna Clark Professor in Public History, University of Technology Sydney.

Kate Fullagar's important new work, *Bennelong and Phillip: A History Unravelled*, reaches into Australia's early colonial history to tease out, quite literally, the threads of its past. In doing so, it brings a creative and original lens to a foundational relationship.

The book focuses on the curious entanglement between Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, and Woollarawarre Bennelong, a Wangal man born around 1764, who grew up by the Parramatta River.

Phillip was a British Royal Naval Officer with an extensive military career, including serving in the Napoleonic Wars and conflicts over Spanish colonies in South America. In 1786 he was appointed to lead the First Fleet, that famous flotilla of eleven ships filled with convicts and soldiers that established a penal colony in New South Wales in 1788.

Representing the might of a global and acquisitive Empire, Phillip has also been remembered for how he guided the colony in its early years (despite famine and unrest, as well as unimaginable isolation), along with his commitment to "establishing and maintaining friendly and peaceful relations" with Aboriginal people. His official orders to "conciliate their affections" and "live in amity and kindness with them" have framed the ways early Australian colonial histories presented Phillip as an emblem of the Enlightenment and loyal servant of the British Empire.

Bennelong was also a diplomat, a speaker of multiple languages and a curious, gregarious interlocutor. The historian Keith Vincent Smith described Bennelong's childhood, growing up on the banks of the Parramatta River spearing snapper and cutting sheets of bark to build his own Nawi canoe. He was initiated as a teenager, where scars were raised on his chest and arms and his upper front tooth was knocked out to show that he was a man. He could now take a wife and hunt kangaroos and dingoes.

Bennelong would have been about 24 when the First Fleet arrived. He was dramatically thrust into its world when kidnapped from a harbour beach in Manly in November 1789, along with Gadigal man Colebee, in a curious attempt to build relationships between the colonists and Aboriginal clans.

Despite that violent beginning, Bennelong became a critical member of that early intercultural dialogue and was also the first Aboriginal man to visit Europe and return. Fullagar explores how the two men's shared history did indeed shape Australia's, but not simply in the way foundational narratives have tended to represent them.

Bennelong and Phillip's life stories have been told and reproduced many times before – in histories, biographies and museum exhibits. Their figures grace our currency, monuments and galleries and their names mark our maps. They are perhaps better known as tropes than actual people – representing a curious, bifurcated tale of rationality and tragedy, Enlightenment and tradition, (colonial) beginnings and (Aboriginal) endings.

Yet when Phillip was speared through the shoulder at Kay-Yee-My (Manly Cove), in retaliation for Bennelong and Colebee's kidnapping and imprisonment, no one could have known what lay ahead. Similarly, when the colony was experiencing famine and its very existence was uncertain, or when a smallpox epidemic wiped out approximately half of the surrounding Aboriginal clans, we cannot assume people knew what would come next.

It's difficult to understand the precariousness and contingency of this history. To do this, Fullagar reaches back in time, but does so in reverse, by inverting the narrative of their relationship. She does this to tease out the lives of the two men in their own right and on their own terms. Critically, her book also exposes the architecture historians draw on, such as using hindsight and chronology, as well as narrative, to make a story appear seamless.

Beginning at the end

Bennelong and Phillip begins at the end, with the funerals of these two men, inviting us to think about how their contrasting but intersecting lives were remembered. Then we move back in time, event by event, chapter by chapter, through the colonial period and before it, to their beginnings.

It's an inspired approach that forces readers to wrestle with our own historical assumptions. It makes clear that for this period in Australia's colonial past, the story certainly isn't one of linear progress, but a messy, often shared, series of entanglements.

Bennelong and Phillip gives us a new, original lens onto this origin story. We see a larger, more complex picture of Phillip, for whom New South Wales was just one chapter of imperial service. And we're offered a much richer, nuanced account of Bennelong, who Fullagar reads in context and on Country.

She also writes beautifully and clearly. That mastery of time and prose is essential, because this isn't the sort of history book you can flick through on autopilot. Our narrative habit as readers to move forward through time is constantly being checked throughout. Maintaining that coherence requires work from the reader but, if this book is a little unsettling, that's probably a good thing.