



ISSUE 2 · SEPT 2022

# SCRIBBLINGS

News from Rae Blair

## My new work in progress

As our daylight hours in Sydney become longer, and the weather improves (La Nina notwithstanding!), it is easier to create time (setting the alarm clock as the sun rises) to get cracking onto my next novel.

I started this novel in November last year during NaNoWriMo ...the National Novel Writing Month...where writers around the world commit to writing 50,000 words in one month. Incredibly, I managed to achieve my goal. The pressure!

Because the focus of NaNoWriMo is achieving a word goal within a set time-frame, I didn't feel I could write an historical novel--based on a true story, where the facts are key--under this type of time pressure. Instead, I've written a fictional story set in contemporary Sydney, about two real estate agents, entitled 'Her Agency'. There are two main protagonists: Nicky is in her forties, married with a child, and really can't afford their Mosman house. Her real estate business is struggling, and her husband appears to have lost interest in her. Also, her mother is facing a confronting illness. Jess, single--not by choice--is in her late twenties and is new to the real estate game. She struggles to find 'her thing' and craves her father's approval, but can't compete with her high-achieving sister, who is married and has a successful medical career.

The story opens with one of the women showing a property to a male prospect in Mosman, which goes horribly wrong. Which woman is involved, and is the Sydney real estate game on the north shore really murder?

I'm loving being in Nicky and Jess's worlds, and I'll keep you up to date on my progress :)

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## What people are saying about 'More Than I Ever Had'

I am so thrilled that 'More Than I Ever Had' - Theo's story - is being enjoyed by so many people. Here are some extracts of recent reviews and star ratings as publishing on Amazon and Goodreads (read the full reviews online):

- ★★★★★ "It is a book definitely worth reading and sharing with your families." H
- ★★★★★ "It's a suspenseful, poignant and thoroughly absorbing read." K
- ★★★★★ GS
- ★★★★★ M
- ★★★★★ LB
- ★★★★★ "Fastpaced snapshots of the period." E
- ★★★★★ AH



## Stockists

Amazon – paperback and eBook (world-wide. Link [here](#) to Australian site)

And, big thank you to these quality booksellers for their support:

[Berkelouw](#) Balgowlah

[Berkelouw](#) Mona Vale

[Better Read Than Dead](#), Newtown

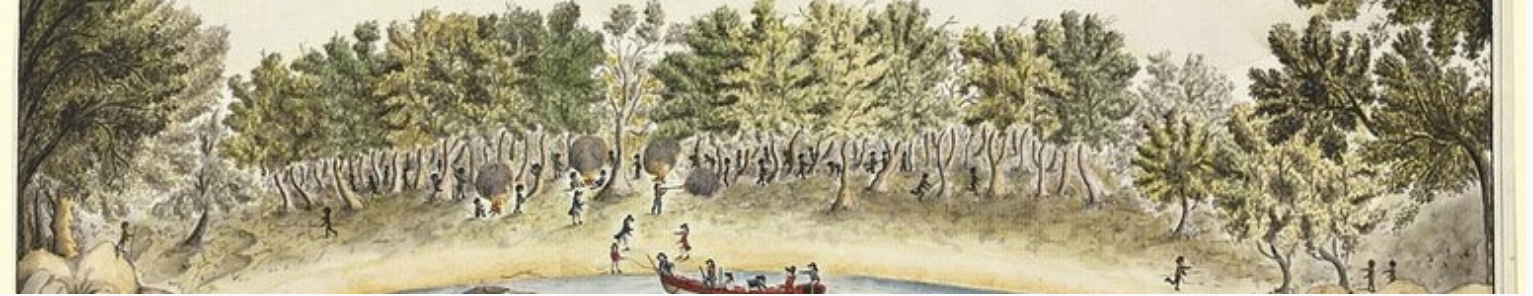
[Burns Bay Bookery](#), Lane Cove

[Harry Hartog](#), Warringah Mall, Brookvale

[Novella](#), Wahroona

[Rutherford & Maine](#), Heathcote, Vic





# Stories for New South Wales History Week 2022

Over the course of New South Wales History Week (held in September 2022), I shared fascinating stories from the very early days of European settlement, that I uncovered during my research for 'More Than I Ever Had'. Using letters and journals giving contemporaneous first-hand accounts of noteworthy events, these seven stories give us an insight into what it was like for Theo Feutrill and the early settlers. Links to these stories, which are on my website (raeblair.com) are below:



The arrival of the Second Fleet



Duelling personalities: Part I  
Macarthur v Gilbert 1789 -  
Tempers on board



Duelling personalities: Part II  
Ross v Hill 1791 -  
A fight for justice



Duelling personalities: Part III  
Paterson v Macarthur 1801 -  
Petty grievances



Military mayhem in 1796 - The Baughan Incident



Perspectives on  
a spearing



A land of drought  
and fire

# BOOK REVIEW

## CHAMPAGNE WIDOWS: FIRST WOMAN OF CHAMPAGNE, VEUVE CLICQUOT

Widowed at age 27 with a six-year-old-daughter, Barbe-Nicole Clicquot—now 'Veuve' Clicquot—faces near insurmountable obstacles to the success of her wine business. Rebecca Rosenberg weaves a gripping tale of Veuve Clicquot's struggles juxtaposing her story with Napoleon Bonaparte's ambitions over the six coalition wars waged from 1792 through to 1814.

Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin's story starts in 1792, where she resists her wealthy parent's pressure to marry 'well', and to hide her genetic 'gift' of Le Nez: an acute sense of smell. Against her parents' wishes—and threatening a lucrative contract to make uniforms for Napoleon's army—Barbe-Nicole marries their neighbour's son, Francois Clicquot, who returns to Reims after many years fighting in Napoleon's war. The war leaves a terrible imprint on Francois, who is forced to battle depression and other manic episodes.

Francois and Barbe-Nicole take-over his father's winery business, and the winemaker, Forneaux (a suitor for Barbe-Nicole before she married Francois), helps Barbe-Nicole to understand how wine is made. It is at Clicquot Manor that Barbe-Nicole encounters Napoleon and his wife, Josephine, who are there to inspect the army uniforms. Here, Barbe-Nicole also encounters the enigmatic 'Red Man', who appears to be Napoleon's Coachman. Readers soon learn that the Red Man holds Napoleon in his thrall, underpinning Napoleon's strategic war decisions. The author renders Napoleon's 'Little Red Man of Destiny' akin to the devil, evocatively describing him as being 'tall and reedy' with 'macabre mutilations' and a 'black tongue.' He wears a red coat 'embroidered with an inverted pentacle' but it is his stench that is noteworthy, being 'putrid and decaying like a decomposed cow carcass crawling with maggots.'

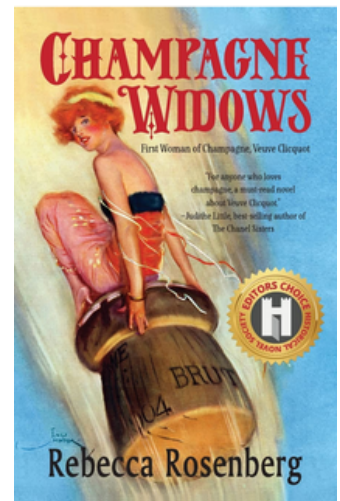
We follow Francois and Barbe-Nicole's business struggles through the Second and Third Coalition Wars, when neighbouring countries want nothing to do with France. But when the Treaty of Amiens is signed in 1802, making peace with the European monarchs, trade routes open and Francois goes on a sales tour. He returns with a German salesman, Louis Bohne, who proves himself the saviour of Clicquot et Fils.

Despite the plummeting sales, they continue to make wine and fill up the cellars, but not only does the Third Coalition War try to break their resolve, but typhus spreads through their business and Francois becomes ill and dies. Broken hearted, Barbe-Nicole is determined to continue, but her father-in-law wants to close the winery. She resists and is forced to take the winemaker, Forneaux, as a business partner. With trade routes restricted, Barbe-Nicole, Forneaux and Louis Bohne, create a strategy to sell to Russia.

Sales to Russia keep the business alive through the Fourth and Fifth Coalition Wars, but the wine quality continues to plague the business. Forneaux refuses the production changes Barbe-Nicole wants to make, so he leaves the business. Then, Napoleon threatens war with Russia, the very market that is sustaining their livelihood. Louis manages to bring back a stack of orders from Russia despite the Tsar banning French wine. When Louis proposes marriage to Barbe-Nicole, she has to decide whether to accept his proposal, which would mean handing over her business to him, or lose him forever. Fate takes the decision out of her hands, and her business continues to struggle.

The sixth coalition war commences in 1812, and Russia reopens trade with England. Napoleon marches towards Russia with his one million soldiers. But for Barbe-Nicole, Russia holds the key to their survival and she makes a bold move and risks her entire business and her very freedom.

This was an enthralling read from the opening to closing pages. Rosenberg weaves historical fact through a human story of endeavour and endurance, and gives us a tale of a woman whose legacy stands as an example of strength and resilience against impossible odds. Highly recommended! Available through [Amazon](#).







## About Rae Blair



After a career in communications and as an editor and corporate writer for more than twenty-five years, I combine my passion for writing and history, with my enthusiasm for genealogy, in my first novel 'More Than I Ever Had.'

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