to exploit, whether it’s the photo opportunity or the spurious law and order card, no matter the misery their myopic actions may cause. Slovo’s book was written in the aftermath of the 2011 London riots, a protest that got quickly out of hand. As they do in this book, the police come to arrest a young man they believe is about to turn violent. They ignore those who know he has mental problems, and the young man dies. It’s not hard to imagine how this escalates. The police fail to adequately communicate with the family of the dead man, leaving hot heads on all sides. The action revolves around three people – the new commissioner of police, the home secretary, and a woman living on the council estate where the death took place. While there is some goodwill on show, those who truly care about the community in which they live are useless in the face of an out-of-control police force and the politicians who back them. Slovo has an eye for small details that allow situations such as this to quickly move under their own weight.

BARRY REYNOLDS
Verdict: Heartbreaking

HIGH SEAS AND HIGH TEAS
ROSLYN RUSSELL
NLA PUBLISHING, RRP $45

Between 1787 and 1900, about 1.6 million immigrants, including about 160,400 convicts, travelled to Australia by ship. Voyages could last more than 100 days, often with no stopovers. Some passengers wrote diaries to keep themselves occupied and as an outlet to vent their frustration with the conditions and other passengers or to record their philosophical or religious reflections. Occasionally an enterprising person would produce a handwritten newspaper. The Manuscripts Collection of the National Library of Australia has about 100 diaries and other first-hand accounts from these voyages. Historian and museum curator Roslyn Russell has used these to illuminate the shipboard experience, supported by an incredible array of art and sketches, including the 1840 oil painting. Descendants of these migrants will get a vivid picture of the challenges involved. Lower-class passengers would dine on mutton fat pudding, while first-class passengers would get fresh meat, slaughtered on board. Then there were foul odours, rats, despotic captains, water rations, disease, violence and fear that the ship wouldn’t make it to the other side of the world. Edith Gedge, who travelled on the Sobraon, wrote: “Sometimes for days the food is so unpalatable as to be almost unpalatable, and the cocoa and soup made by the ship would do an invalid more harm than good.”

BLANCHE CLARK
Verdict: The incredible hulks

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