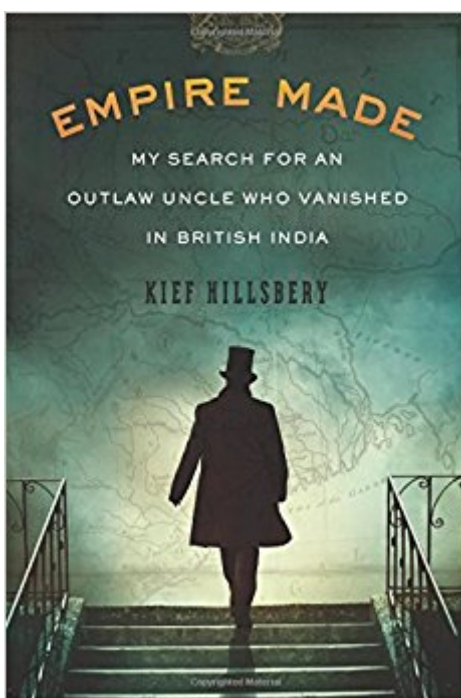


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# Empire Made: My Search For An Outlaw Uncle Who Vanished In British India



## Synopsis

Lost in time for generations, the story of a 19th-century English gentleman in British India – a family mystery of love found and loyalties abandoned, finally brought to light. In 1841, twenty-year-old Nigel Halleck set out for Calcutta as a clerk in the East India Company. He went on to serve in the colonial administration for eight years before abruptly leaving the company under a cloud and disappearing in the mountain kingdom of Nepal, never to be heard from again. While most traces of his life were destroyed in the bombing of his hometown during World War II, Nigel was never quite forgotten – the myth of the man who headed East would reverberate through generations of his family. Kief Hillsbery, Nigel's nephew many times removed, embarked on his own expedition, spending decades researching and traveling through India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nepal in the footsteps of his long-lost relation. In uncovering the remarkable story of Nigel's life, Hillsbery beautifully renders a moment in time when the arms of the British Empire extended around the world. Both a powerful history and a personal journey, *Empire Made* weaves together a clash of civilizations, the quest to discover one's own identity, and the moving tale of one man against an empire.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An honest, pacey portrayal of empire-building at a critical juncture in the Great Game...a fascinating and very surprising read." – Financial Times "Hillsbery's exploration of what happened to his British uncle who went to India in 1841, never to return, makes achingly vivid how difficult it was to escape one's preordained class and societal expectations in

Victorian England – Great details about – Marvelous insights into the British in India, along with a glimpse into gay life. This has a narrative sweep reminiscent of Christopher Hibbert's social histories. – • – œBOOKLIST \*\*Starred Review\*\* – “There are travelers who can't write and writers who can't travel. Fortunately for his readers, Kief Hillsbery can do both. Part travelogue, part family memoir, *Empire Made* is a fine and moving tale, sensitively explored and beautifully written. – • – • Justin Marozzi, author of *Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood*

KIEF HILLSBERY is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *War Boy*. A former contributing editor and columnist for *Outside* and a former writer for *Rolling Stone*.

An interesting insight on individuals in the east India co. I went to school in 1959 at what was still known as haileybury and imperial service college, that dates me ! My house was called Evelyn but another house was called. Lawrence, after Henry Lawrence ?? It's conjecture that Nigel was gay and unnecessary as a conclusion.

Writer Kief Hillsbery new book, "Empire Made: My Search for an Outlaw Uncle Who Vanished in British India", is an excellent read...for the right reader. That reader should be interested in Raj India, as well as a search for an ancestral figure who may have thrown off his British garb and "gone native". Kief Hillsbery - who is British on his mother's side - was interested in the tale of her many-times "great uncle", Nigel Halleck. Halleck went to India in 1841 in the employ of the British East India Company, then in power in most of India. He wrote copious letters home, from which Hillsbery was able discern Halleck's jobs and journeys. Added within the tale of Halleck, Hillsbery intersperses his own fascination with India and his travels, begun when he was a student in the mid-1970's. On that first trip, where Hillsbery traveled through present day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, he looked for the spots referred to in Halleck's letters. Some he found; others didn't exist anymore. He was trying, too, to find Halleck's grave site, and cause of death. There had been some speculation that Halleck ended up being eaten by a tiger, after having abandoned his British identity in Nepal. Hillsbery book's is a superb look at the Raj, with the politics, economics, and societal factors written from primary sources, like "great-uncle" Nigel's letters. Hillsbery's book is eclectic, with topics ranging from personal identity to the sexual habits of male Pashtuns. Make sure you have access to Wiki as you read the book, as you may have questions about people, places, and events.

I thought this would be a great true-life mystery -- what happened to the author's great-great-great-something uncle who served in India when the British ruled the country in the 1800s. Mysteriously, he just disappeared. Was he killed? Did he go native? The family just never knew. Kief Hillsbery set out to uncover his relative's ancient secret. Sad to say, this story is so convoluted, I just could not follow along. The narrative ping pongs between the uncle's story, the author's personal story, historical background of the times, and flat-out flights of fancy. The author would foreshadow something, and I'd be looking for more, and then he'd drop it for hundreds of pages, until I could no longer remember what it was he had been leading up to. In addition, I was really frustrated that although much of the hunt relies on the uncle's letters, the author does not quote them directly. He drops a phrase or two from the letters here and there, but it's almost as though there were a copyright issue and he had to restrict himself to fair use. Lacking the uncle's voice, I got no sense of his personality, so consequently I didn't really care what happened. In the end, I'm not sure there was enough of a story to draw it out to book length. There were too many instances of "would have," "might have," "it would have been" and the like, that I got the feeling that 99 percent of the story was pure conjecture. I really enjoy reading exhilarating stories from the past that have been completely pieced together by research and interviews (like Erik Larsen's *Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania*), but for me, this is not one of them.

Hillsbery is quite a fantastic writer. The story is also quite good. I enjoyed it immensely. Public library. No purchase. As a retired history teacher topics like colonialism fascinate me. Especially India, Viet Nam, etc. The premise of the story is also intriguing. Looking for an uncle who disappeared scores of years ago basically without a trace. His history of the British East India Company and its operatives is also fascinating. The author's observations of the impact of history, especially British colonialism in India and what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan, is prescient. He explains much of the trouble the West experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan through the lens of decisions made two centuries and more ago by the British. The author also takes the reader through his explorations and discoveries towards finding out the true story of Uncle Nigel. Here go the thumbs down, and I apologize profusely. I love 95% of the book. The discovery that Uncle Nigel was gay and the author's gay experiences, too, were to me a little hard to take. I guess being a little older and conservative some new sexual mores and realities are still somewhat difficult to understand. I never saw this ending coming, which is probably a testament to Kief's skill as a scribe. This may not be troubling to you. Otherwise book is quite good.

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