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Perkin shaped the modern newspaper

**BREAKING NEWS —
THE GOLDEN AGE OF
GRAHAM PERKIN**
Ben Hills
(Scribe, \$59.95)

THERE is an oft-quoted remark aimed squarely at workaholics suggesting that no one lays on their death bed worrying they have not spent enough time at the office.

Well, move over for late, and great, editor of Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, Graham Perkin who, according to many sources quoted here, was just such a hopelessly obsessed person.

It is not too short of the truth to claim that Perkin spent as many of his waking hours at *The Age* as would allow over nine years, (he slept only four hours a night), as he shaped the broadsheet's issue of the following day.

Among newspaper movers and shakers long hours are common, yet Perkin led the way despite the grumbles of his wife and fellow staff.

Even cancer could not keep Perkin from the office as he ignored doctors' demands following a serious operation that he take three months off.

It was a combination of overwork, smoking, booze and lack of exercise that eventually carried off Perkin ("this big, bluff cyclone of a man" according to Hills) at the youngish age of 45.

Perkin's memorial is, nevertheless, the triumph of a Melbourne newspaper that had seen better days, "an obscure provincial journal published out of a Dickensian rats' nest" in Collins Street, and hidebound by a fusty board and staff, yet transformed into what was to become acknowledged as one of the world's 10 best broadsheets, a list that included London's *The Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Hills unabashedly names Perkin, for whom he worked as a reporter, as "the country's greatest editor of the 20th century". There is no real dispute.

"He changed forever the way Australian newspapers look at the world and what the public expects of its newspapers," Hills says.

To do so was an amazing achievement for the lad from the Mallee who began his journalistic cadetship on the *Warracknabeal Herald* even if Perkin timed his move to *The Age*, and editorship, well as he rode a wave which saw the cultural fading of the Menzies era through to the end of the scandal-racked Whitlam Government.

Perkin revamped the paper, brought in women reporters, introduced cartoons, restaurant reviews, arts' coverage and columns including introducing that of Phillip Adams, incidentally syndicated to *The Examiner*.

Hill's views are coloured by having worked for Perkin for six years and thus includes the author's pungent views on the newspaper's current management.

There is a very human, and often wry, touch to this necessarily weighty story of Perkin, a newspaper's life force whose legacy prevails.

— MARTIN STEVENSON



The Age editor Graham Perkin makes time to have a picture taken in his Collins Street office