



# FRIDAYS AT THE LIBRARY A FLINDERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SUCCESS STORY

Screen and Media lecturer Mike Walsh and student Sam Harvey getting ready for the screening

**O**n a Friday afternoon in October 2000 a smallish audience gathered in the Noel Stockdale Room at Flinders University Library to hear author Anthony J Brown talk about his new book, *Ill-Starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin*. This was the first in the *Fridays at the Library* series, which has offered free lectures, readings, films and music – not to mention free food and wine – regularly ever since. GILLIAN DOOLEY and LAUREN GOBBETT tell us more.

We have hosted writers, politicians, historians, scientists and media personalities. We've discussed human rights, elections, stem cells, Indian history, environmental change, school canteens and Australia's literary culture. We've screened historical films on migration, motoring and maritime history. We've presented music from Jane Austen's collection and settings of the songs from *The Tempest*. We've launched books, collections and websites, and celebrated anniversaries of battles, organisations and famous people. Earlier this year we held our 100th event. With an average of 50 people attending each event, that means we've reached a lot of people.

The intention always was to open the library up to the wider world through *Fridays at the Library* by showcasing the work of university staff and engaging with the community. To broaden our reach we have presented some events off-site each year, usually at our city campus on Victoria Square – but not always. On one memorable occasion we screened films from a ship in dry dock at the Port Adelaide Maritime Museum. We have also partnered with many organisations – SA Film Corporation, Birdwood Motor Museum, History Council of SA and even the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Later this year, we are proud to be presenting the Ray Mathew Lecture with Melbourne author Andrea Goldsmith, in collaboration with the National Library and *Australian Book Review*.

Our audience is consistent and seems appreciative, but we thought it time to evaluate the series to see if it is achieving our objectives. Simply put, who are our audience, and why do they keep coming?

A team of researchers was formed under the auspices of Flinders University Library's Research Working Group.

We gained approval from the University's Research Ethics Committee to conduct a survey of our audience – essential if we wish to publish the results of our research.

First we did a census of university libraries in Australia and New Zealand to find out how many of them run similar events. We discovered that, although about 25 percent host public events, none were quite like ours. Most often, a Friends of the Library group organises the events, or else they are more narrowly focused on the library's resources.

Our survey confirmed that the series makes a positive contribution to the university's community engagement program. People come to Fridays at the Library because they find the topics and speakers interesting and, in particular, they like history, the arts and current affairs. They enjoy the informality and the opportunity to meet like-minded people and find the events informative, stimulating and topical. The variety is also appreciated. Most of the attendees are from the local area and the vast majority are over 55. The events are free and open to all, but only 25 percent of respondents are current staff and students; the rest are evenly divided between former staff and students, and visitors.

This survey has been valuable because it confirmed our impressions and provided demographic information about our audience. Importantly, it has given them an opportunity to provide feedback and shown them that we value their opinions. And it was gratifying that the overwhelming response to the question 'What can we do to improve?' was 'Nothing'!

Information about Fridays at the Library can be found at <http://bit.ly/1TMor2q>

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Special Collections Librarian Gillian Dooley, admin officer Melinda Pike and Senior Liaison Librarian Raechel Damarell, sing a trio from *The Tempest*.



Flinders Records and Archives Manager Bas De Groot giving his expert summary of the Battle of Waterloo.

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