

## U3A December meeting

The December meeting took the form of a members-only party with a delicious Christmas-themed buffet plus plenty of entertainment.

Mu Garbutt put together an imaginative stage play based on the *Frederick* escape - the subject of '*The Ship That Never Was*', Australia's longest-running play performed every evening by the Round Earth Theatre Company in Strahan, Tasmania.

It is based on the true story of British convicts who were transported to Australia and later hijacked a boat to escape. This story was played out by various members of the U3A in 'elaborate' costumes. The story was punctuated with rousing singing from the Lowestoft Longshoremen, a local sea shanty group who included songs such as '*What shall we do with the drunken sailor?*'

The story goes that between 1787 and 1868 some 160,000 convicts were transported from the UK to Australia, about 4,000 from Norfolk.

Many of them were used for boat construction. The brig *Frederick* was the last vessel to be constructed on Macquarie Harbour Penal Station on Sarah Island, Tasmania. The convicts thought they would be transferred to Port Arthur prison where the conditions were rumoured to be brutal. On 14 January 1834 ten of the convicts seized the opportunity to

escape by hijacking the Frederick and sailing across the South Pacific to Chile where they lived freely for 2 years. Four of the convicts were later recaptured and returned to Australia where they escaped on a legal technicality. Two of the crew, James Porter and William Shires, argued successfully that as the Frederick had not yet been officially launched it was impossible for them to have committed piracy and they were found not guilty.

There was lots of audience participation both in the play and singing alongside the amazing Lowestoft Longshoremen and everyone left feeling very uplifted.

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