

January 2025

Explorer Matthew Flinders coffin plate showcased for the first time in Australia in city campus exhibition

The coffin plate of renowned explorer Matthew Flinders takes centre stage in a new exhibition reflecting on the life and enduring legacy of the University's namesake.

Hosted by Flinders University in partnership with the History Trust of South Australia, the exhibition, *Matthew Flinders: Fearless in life, love, and tragedy*, marks the first time the coffin plate has been displayed on Australian shores.

This noteworthy event comes just six months after Flinders' remains were reburied in Lincolnshire, UK.

Matthew Flinders passed away on 19 July 1814 and was buried at St James church, Hampstead Road, London. Over time, alterations to the churchyard obscured his burial site.

In January 2019, during archaeological excavations for the HS2 rail project, Flinders' grave was rediscovered. The engraved lead plate on his coffin provided definitive identification, making this discovery possible.

When Flinders was reburied, a replica coffin plate was placed with him. It was gifted to the History Trust of South Australia and accepted on our behalf by the Governor of South Australia, Frances Adamson AC, by Flinders' descendants, in recognition of his significant contribution to the state's colonial history.

Upon acceptance of the plate on behalf of South Australia, it became part of the State History Collection under the care of the History Trust of South Australia, the statutory authority responsible for the research, collection and sharing of South Australia's history.

The plate will be on public display at Flinders University City Campus alongside other significant artefacts held by Flinders University.

These include Flinders' pocket compass made of ebony timber, brass buttons from his naval jacket and a rare first edition of *A Voyage to Terra Australis*. His crowning achievement, Flinders' *Voyage* covers his life's work in three monumental volumes, including detailed maps and illustrations.

The exhibition also features a letter from Flinders to his wife, a coral necklace gifted to his sister and a needlework sampler completed by his great-niece, Susanna Pilgrim. Susanna created the sampler as a young girl while aboard the *Bolivar*, which arrived at Port Adelaide 175 years ago.

Later generations of the Pilgrim family, South Australia's closest living link to Matthew Flinders, were instrumental in establishing the statue of their famous ancestor on North Terrace in 1921.

Exhibition co-curator and Director of the Flinders University Museum of Art, Fiona Salmon, shares a familial connection to Matthew Flinders through the Pilgrim family; a connection which paved the way for the donation of many treasured heirlooms to Flinders University in 2024.

“Given my personal connection to Matthew Flinders, I’m delighted to be involved in this exhibition bringing rarely seen artefacts into the public domain”, she says.

“Through these exquisite objects we gain a sense of Flinders’ achievements as an expert navigator and meticulous cartographer while also glimpsing a warm, sensitive and generous human being.”

While focusing on Flinders, the exhibit also honours Bungaree, a trusted guide and skilled intermediary critical to the success of expeditions undertaken by Flinders and others.

Born circa 1775 on Garigal country, Bungaree moved south to Sydney during the 1790s and became a prominent figure in the fledging colony.

Research shows that Bungaree sailed with Flinders twice before being recruited for the epic voyage around the Australian continent aboard the *Investigator* from 1801 to 1803.

Described in his writings as ‘my friend Bongaree’, Flinders relied on Bungaree’s deep knowledge of Aboriginal culture and ability to foster peaceful relations with coastal communities during landings and interactions onshore.

“Bungaree placed himself at great personal risk and his efforts were indispensable in protecting the crew and ensuring safe passage,” says Director Salmon.

“Flinders openly acknowledged Bungaree’s courage and dedication, praising him as a ‘worthy and brave fellow.’”

History Trust of South Australia senior curator, Tony Kanellos says Flinders’ legacy endures in Australia, where his name is linked to over 200 topographical features and places, reflecting his extensive exploration, particularly along South Australia’s coastline.

“Renowned for his intrepid spirit, cartographic innovations, scientific contributions, and care for his crew, he is inscribed in Australia’s colonial history as a figure of compassion, courage and ingenuity.”

***Matthew Flinders: Fearless in life, love, and tragedy* is a free exhibition on display on Level 1, Flinders University City Campus, Festival Plaza.**

Monday 13 January–Friday 14 February.

Monday–Friday 10am–6pm | Saturdays 11–4pm | Closed Sundays and Public Holidays

For more information contact:

Yaz Dedovic, Media Relations Manager

P: (08) 8201 5920 **Mob:** (61) 0401 095 501

Email: yaz.dedovic@flinders.edu.au