



AN IMPASSIONED AUSSIE AUTHOR

It seems that there is almost no corner of Australian history to which prolific author and journalist PETER FITZSIMONS won't turn his attention. His latest book, *Burke and Wills*, tells the story of Australia's most famous doomed explorers. We asked Peter to take a few minutes out of his busy writing schedule to tell us about what libraries have meant to him and the role that they could play in the move to establishing an Australian republic.

THE WHAT ARE YOUR CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF LIBRARIES?

The Bookmobile visited Peats Ridge Public School on the last Friday of every month and I loved it. It was run by a man with a big beard who smelled of cigarettes. He was a kindly soul who encouraged us all to read – and we did!

Peter FitzSimons

DO YOU THINK LIBRARIES ARE IMPORTANT PLACES IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Yes. They are cornerstones on which the intellectual life of a community frequently rests. Phillip Adams once said, 'Show me a person who reads a book a week, and I will show you a good person.' Libraries breed good communities.

AS A YOUNG PERSON DID YOU HAVE A ROLE MODEL OR SOMEONE WHO INSPIRED YOU TO TAKE UP WRITING?

Mr Baldwin was my English teacher in Year 11 and Year 12. He was a very effete gentleman and very old – and not given to readily handing out praise. But late in 1979 he said to me in a very excited manner, 'FitzSimons, FitzSimons! That is one of the best essays I've ever read!' It planted a seed

that was about a decade in gestating, but gestate it did, and then it bloomed.

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT AUSTRALIAN HISTORY AND THEN WRITE ABOUT IT?

I've always loved Australian history, but when I wrote a book about Nancy Wake, the war heroine, expecting it to sell 10,000 copies only to see it sell 200,000 copies, I suddenly got very interested!

DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR LIBRARY OR LIBRARIAN THAT YOU USE TO HELP YOU RESEARCH YOUR BOOKS?

Glenda Lynch at the Australian War Memorial is the best in the business. I use her for all my military books.

WHAT PROMPTS YOU TO START RESEARCHING A BOOK?

Someone – frequently my eldest brother, David – tells me a story that grips me, and I follow it up from there. If there hasn't been a book done in recent times, or I think it hasn't been told in the way I tell it, I pursue!

DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS ON WHAT AND HOW AUSTRALIAN HISTORY IS TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS AND CHANGES COULD BE MADE?

To grip the masses, they need to focus on the story part of history. That's how Rex Ward got us interested in the Eureka Stockade in Year 10, and I went from there.

YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT MANY THINGS, INCLUDING AUSTRALIA BECOMING A REPUBLIC. COULD LIBRARIES CONTRIBUTE TO AND SUPPORT THIS DEBATE?

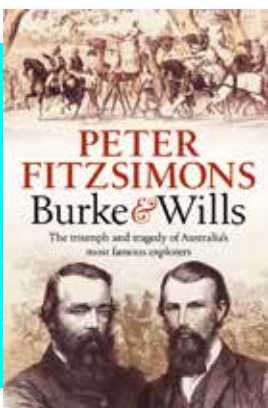
Yes. Libraries and a passion for the Australian republic are for smart, engaged people. We must support each other! If any of your libraries can get me an audience of 150 people, and invite me to talk on the republic, I'd be delighted to come.

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

I have a book – *Monash's Masterpiece* – coming out in June, and before Christmas I'll be releasing *Mutiny on the Bounty, Uprising at Pitcairn*.

WHAT DO YOU PREFER – THE PRINTED BOOK, E-READER OR BOTH?

Paper book. 📖



Burke and Wills: The triumph and tragedy of Australia's most famous explorers by Peter FitzSimons is published by Hachette, rrp \$49.99.

Dreading your library move?

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