We already know quite a lot about Trim, the Captain’s Cat - from the captain himself. While held by the French authorities in Mauritius for seven years, Matthew Flinders wrote a Biographical Tribute to the Memory of Trim, an affectionate account of his ship’s cat who accompanied him on numerous voyages, including that of Investigator, charting the southern coast of Terra Australis in 1801. The essay tells us a great deal about this intrepid animal who enjoyed ship’s life and, in particular, the privileges of the captain’s table. It also tells us much about the wry, good humour of the young Matthew Flinders.

Anne Brookman has taken this portrait of Trim and its early Nineteenth century shipboard detail and woven a story of a stowaway cat, Abby (Trim immediately calls her Scabby) and her life below deck, larking with Trim and teaching him a lesson or two about what it is to have to fend for yourself. And, when Abby has to scarper to shore at Kangaroo Island because, as a fortune-teller’s cat, she is thought to have brought a curse on the ship, who should she hitch a ride with, but Captain Nicholas Baudin, Flinders’s rival in the race to circumnavigate Australia.

Director Susan McClements and a fine cast, including on-stage musician and composer Zoe Barry, bring together these commentaries of cats and captains to make a delightful production. Dean Hills’ bold set of a ship’s deck with sturdy planks and barrels, metal rigging and thick ropes sweeping down from the flies, has four large screens which work as sails, large maps and screens for giant shadow puppets of Flinders and Baudin.

Paul Blackwell again shows his comic invention as Trim. In conventional period costume, with little more than a pair of white gloves, toe-caps and some tacked-on black ears, he conjures a top cat, used to Access All Areas, and pampered by everyone but the ship’s cook. It is a quite brilliant performance, and with not a Lloyd Webber cliché in sight. The interplay with...
Ksenja Logos, excellent as the bohemian Abby, makes the contrivance of the stowaway cat not just possible, but a terrific idea. Andrew Martin is also most serviceable in multiple nautical roles, including the redoubtable Captain Thistle.

Although pitched to primary school audiences, in The Stowaway and the Captain’s Cat, Anne Brookman has written a text likely to teach us all a thing or two about our history. The Festival Centre Trust is back in business with an in-house production, at last. Let’s hope Trim and Abby get to circumnavigate Australian theatres very soon.