

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP NEWS February 2009 U3A Browns Bay

Ancient civilisations: We had a quick look at some of the early archaeologists who made possible the study of ancient civilizations. Some historians have referred to several of them as grave robbers. Depends on which side of the line one stands. There was also an introduction to different aspects of language; oral, with early attempts to equate sound and visual to symbols and thus form a written language. This will be followed up in the New Year when we continue our Egyptian studies. This second half will include several of the better known Pharaohs and their accomplishments, plus the various foreign conquerors and traders who left their mark on Egyptian history.

Antiques and collectables: The first meeting will be on the 19th February. The subjects that day will be mirrors & dressing table articles.

Archaeology : The First Meeting of the U3A Browns Bay Archaeology. Agenda: Future Directions, Introduction to the archaeology of the North Shore, General & Group photo.

Art history & appreciation: At our next meeting on 16th February, Jennifer is going to talk about the Franz Marc Museum (opened in 2008) that she visited in Kochel in Bavaria. She also visited the Gabrielle Munter House in Murnau nearby which has many August Macke paintings.

Asian studies: IRAN: This is a nation of contrasts. Its climate includes frigid winters and boiling hot summers. The topography ranges from towering mountains to deep valleys and from barren deserts to abundant marshlands. The people are friendly and welcoming, many of them highly educated and deeply religious. However, Iran also has a history of harshness and barbarity particularly on the part of many of its leaders.

Computers: The first part of December's meeting was taken up with general business. We'll continue to have an additional meeting each month for those members who would like a more hands-on get-together, - this will be in small groups round a computer in members' homes. After discussion of suggestions for next year's meetings and some airing of recent problems and experiences, we had a delicious Christmas morning tea.

Creative writing: We had a meeting in January; stories written with the opening sentence "As soon as he walked in I knew he would want to touch it". As you can imagine, a very mixed bag of tales.

Exploring art for fun: We gathered expectantly for a Christmas BBQ, but NO! Awaiting us was a twenty-five question Exploring Art for Fun *Exploring Sheet!* Panic! It was an open book examination! Memories of teachers drilling into us about the necessity of knowing the text books well before even attempting to use them in an examination came flooding back. Our protests fell on deaf ears! Access to a wonderful library of art books sidetracked the penetrating questions with their beautiful paintings and descriptions. *Exploring Art for Fun* certainly happened today, and our desperate efforts rewarded with entry to the BBQ Lunch! Great fun had by all.

Family memoirs – Writing group: For our last meeting of the year we wrote about "Something New". A beautiful gold watch for a birthday present was especially precious as the family were trying hard to live as frugally as possible but the husband has put aside small amounts for a long time to make this surprise happen; a new baby girl was an eventful time in a married couple's life; a box of coloured pencils won in an Enid Blyton competition during wartime rationing; a first proposal at an early age from an overseas pen-pal, was declined, but many years later a member of the family travelling in Sri Lanka looked him up -and he had no teeth! The long awaited arrival of a first grandchild; and buying the first Television in 1965 - black and white of course!

Film appreciation: "Some of our group saw the film "The Visitor" recently - excellent acting and script. A disillusioned Connecticut Economics Professor having recently lost his wife (a classical pianist) and his passion for teaching and writing is sent to Manhattan to attend a conference. In the apartment he owns there, he finds a Syrian man and his Senegalese girlfriend has taken up residence, victims of a Real Estate scam. Having nowhere to go he allows them to stay with him and they awaken him to a new world and way of life. Two holiday break movies "Australia" Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman and "Female Agents" - a group of French women recruited by UK for dangerous adventure in 1944 occupied France."

Français pour rire: We had quite a concentrated session at our last meeting, listening to and speaking French. Our first topic, which we'd prepared, was a picture of a flower seller and his stall in the *marché*. Then Bill read another instalment of our serial story of a holiday in Dinard. His questions tested not only our French but also our short-term memories! Lastly our Swiss friend Heidi led us in a description of *La Fête du Poulain*, the Mardi Gras celebration in Pézenas in the South of France. We finished the year with our usual visit to the *Au Bon Coin café et pâtisserie* in Beach Haven where we had a delicious French lunch. We'd like to thank Bill for leading the group. We're all at different levels, but he makes the meetings fun for all.

Literature group: Our December meeting was a Christmas lunch and at our February meeting we will be discussing our summer holiday reading.

Local history: Our final meeting for the year was a relaxed occasion with members sharing snippets of historical interest. From Hot-Rods to photos of New Zealand waterfalls, a history of Devonport's Esplanade Hotel and life in the early part of the 20th century, and an account of being at Grant Park in Chicago when Obama was pronounced as President-elect. The items were many and varied and included a book review by Rex of the book, "From Coast to Coast" by Bob Harvey displaying photographs of our wonderful West coast. The meeting concluded with a shared festive lunch and we look forward to the New Year and its challenges.

Modern history: In December, Scott gave a colourful PowerPoint presentation on the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster: the planned 'safety experiment.' which went awry, the resulting steam explosion, the radiation fallout and the consequences. Quite unnecessary. UN estimate 4000 deaths over 20 years. Serious lack of quality control systems. As well as revising our nuclear physics we used a Geiger counter to check body parts and implants(!), radioactive rocks, a smoke detector, luminous clock paint and uranium nitrate. Volunteers got a feel for energy conversion with a simple generator. A most informative and interesting experience followed by Wine, Christmas music, Laughter and Pizzas. Next Meeting 18th February: *Sri Lanka*, Dave & June Thorpe, venue to be confirmed.

Travel: Our speaker, Kerry, gave a very interesting talk about her trip to Borneo. This covered the Mulu National Park where she visited the Clearwater Cave System; a few nights in a Longhouse in Skandis with fourteen families who eked out a subsistent living; a trek to the Pinnacles in Sarawak which was a very difficult and long climb; Kuching city; and in Sabah another climb up Mt Kinabalu but the weather turned so they had to abandon it; a night in the jungle in tents with lots of leaches; watching turtles lay eggs; and the Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre where there was an opportunity to be up close to a semi tame female Orang-utan, and a special park where the proboscis monkeys can be seen.

Walking group: A very successful walk round Castor Bay / Kennedy Park ended up at a members house for Christmas morning tea. We also said Farewell to our leader Robyn wishing her well in her new home in Christchurch.

World religions: No formal group meeting in Dec. as members enjoyed for a pre- Christmas lunch at "Gaku" restaurant in Brown's Bay.