

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP NEWS April 2009 U3A Browns Bay

Ancient Civilisations: The Egyptian Empire which lasted well over 3000 years, became increasingly involved in trade by land and sea, their boats having long sailed the Mediterranean. Their fleet however, was always intended as a merchant service, rather than a proper maritime power. Ports were established in the Nile Delta and on the edge of the Red Sea where ships set out for the East African coast to Punt (modern Somalia?) and beyond the Sinai desert linking into various trade routes as far as Afghanistan. There is evidence of Egyptian trade with the early Greeks, Minoans and Mycenaens and by the 6th century BC was fully a part of the Greek trading networks of the Mediterranean. The Romans had a major port on the Red Sea at Berenike. Excavations there yielding a fascinating picture of a thriving sophisticated port and multi-national market.

Anthropology: Joyce told us the story of magnificent old trees, sourced from a book by Thomas Pakenham, entitled "Meetings With Remarkable Trees". Recommended for tree lovers. John continued his account from the 1929 publication, "Kohi Kohanga", written by Vernon Roberts, a family member. A most interesting historical story of earlier times.

Antiques and Collectables: The earliest mirrors were of polished metal, dating back to the ancient Egyptians and the Etruscans. In 1507 two young men in Morano used an amalgam of mercury and tin to perfect the process of silvering and were granted a monopoly on producing mirrors by this method for 20 years. Hanging mirrors were not available until the late 17th century, when the Duke of Buckingham perfected a method of pouring molten glass into shallow trays to produce a satisfactory mirror glass in sheets up to a metre long. Dressing table articles, [such hand mirrors, brushes, combs, trays, powder bowls, manicure sets and little boxes for hair pins, studs etc] was the other topic of the meeting. These were in a variety of materials.

Archaeology: Tony Hall, an archaeologist studying for his PhD at Auckland University spoke to the group about the archaeology of the North Shore and the Islands of the Hauraki Gulf. Some of the richest sites are Ponui Island Browns island and Motutapu. The most excavated area is Motutapu Island, especially Pig Bay and Sunday Bay where remains dating back to 1350 -1500 BC have been found. We also heard about the importance of Torpedo Bay (Devonport) and the three or more Pa surrounding it. We are planning to do two field trips in Spring: one to Torpedo Bay and one to an area North of Long Bay. Next Meeting April 21st. Peter will be talking to us about "Houses"

Art History & appreciation: Our guest speaker, NZ born Canadian, Bev Tosh talked about her all consuming project which resulted in a large exhibition. This exhibition has been seen all over Canada, including being shown at the War Museum in Ottawa. Her mother was a "War bride" to NZ who returned to Canada with her daughters after a decade in NZ. Many years later Bev researched her mother's story as well as many others. The resulting exhibition titled "One Way Passage" includes 80 life-sized oil paintings on ply-wood. Bev also showed a documentary about the project. Several NZ galleries have shown interest in the exhibition. We all hope that the NZ part will be shown somewhere close. There are many fascinating stories to be explored.

Asian studies: "Why are we in Afghanistan?" Our group was presented with this question and a possible answer is as follows. The petroleum reserves of the Caspian Sea Basin are among the largest in the world and are mostly unexploited. Control of this vast energy reserve in Central Asia is contended by USA, China, Russia, Iran and Canada. Therefore this may serve to highlight the disturbing hypocrisy of a war in Afghanistan, a war marketed as one being fought for the liberation of a brutalized and oppressed people. Control of the Caspian Basin energy could be the geopolitical economic motive for our involvement in Afghanistan, one that we seldom if ever hear about.

Computers: We had a most fascinating meeting this month, branching out into an area of computer use quite new to most of us. Garry showed us how to make a video from our still photos. We hired the U3A projector, and, as Garry built up the video on his laptop, we were able to watch every step in relaxed comfort. Using his Sony Vegas program, he put his chosen photos on to a stretched timeline, then added music, making the music change with each new photo. Using different tools on his program he was able to produce different effects, making the pictures seem to move. The resulting video was most impressive.

Creative writing: The subject was "High Flyer" This produced a children's story about spiders, a story of the life of a boy to manhood, a German student with great potential, travel photos and grandmas caged bird and finally a flight from Heath Row to New York that brings back a lost memory. We finished with a very stimulation discussion on speech and dialect.

Exploring art for fun: The March meeting, held at the Boston's was initially devoted to planning the group's activities for the rest of 2009 – this successfully accomplished, "Exploring art for Fun" was treated to a visit to the Te Papa exhibition "Monet and the Impressionists" via the magic of the internet and computer, led by Roy Boston. Several members hope to visit the exhibition before it closes on May 17th - this pre-visit will help them to prepare themselves for the wonders to come!

Family memoirs – Writing group: Fences was an unusual title for a story but it held our interest and led to a discussion about fences in our neighbourhood and how they reflect the owners; A visit to the Canadian Air Base where wartime training was done and to meet some of the families from those days; the start of the civil war in Rhodesia and all the horrors for the population, leading up to becoming Zimbabwe; a family tradition of writing a personal letter to a child when he reaches 40 years of age had some funny anecdotes to share with us; the war in England and being bombed then pulled out of the wreckage then being evacuated to the Moors; and meeting up with a best friend not seen since Primary School days and catching up on the missed years since then.

Film appreciation: The meeting opened with a general discussion about the movies that were seen since last month; "Dean Spanley", "Welcome to the Sticks", and, "The Woman". Author John Grogan (Marley and Me) was to hold a lecture at Auckland's Central City Library on Wednesday, 25 March 2009 (5:30 p.m.) if members were interested. Jasmine presented (on Evelyn's behalf) a short DVD on the Tunnels of Cu Chi outside of Saigon, Viet Nam. These tunnels were an underground network that housed hospitals, communication rooms, supply depots, and a means of moving troops for the Viet Cong. Hidden entrances and exits were used extensively to ambush American troops. Once the tunnels were discovered, some of the heaviest bombing of the Viet Nam War was carried out in the Cu Chi district.

Français pour rire: In February, Bill gave an introduction to the scrapbook which was handed around for perusal. Heidi gave a talk about Picardie in a rural setting with some French. We had a question of French interest Quels montagnes séparent L'Alsace de la Lorraine? Answer: Les Vosges. There was no monthly talk on French topics.

Geology: The Group is now meeting on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month in members' homes. As we will be on a field trip to Port Jackson on the Coromandel Peninsula in April there will be no formal meeting.

Literature group: Bev reviewed "I Dreamed of Africa" by Kuki Gallman. Kuki and her husband bought 100,000 acres in North West Kenya, an area of outstanding beauty and rich in wild life. Also Bev recommended "Yesterdays in Maoriland" by Andreas Reischek, an Austrian, who came to New Zealand in 1877 and stayed 12 years. This book is full of his observations of the countryside as it was then of the flora and fauna, especially the birds. He described the way of life of the Maori people, their crafts, tools, and way of life. Ruth shared her enjoyment of "The Uncommon Reader" by Alan Bennett. This is a humorous fictional novel about the Queen becoming a reader from a mobile library at the Palace kitchen door.

Local History: There were 19 members present and we welcomed Sheila as a visitor. The group has decided to include either a book review or a mini talk at each meeting. Des gave a very well researched talk on the History of the Riverhead area. This included the purchase of the area from the Maoris, the establishment of a paper mill, the felling and industry surrounding kauri logs, the establishment of a cooperage, a pottery works which specialized in drainage pipes, a flour mill and biscuit manufacturer and a paper mill. The area opened up with the introduction of the railway and new wharves which gave easier access to markets for the tobacco growing, fruit and vegetable supplies and the vineyards. Our next meeting will be led by Patricia who will once again delight us with her memories of Auckland.

Modern History: At our March meeting George gave us an interesting talk on the German occupation of the Channel Is. in WW2. He described the ways the Islanders managed to survive with dwindling food and other supplies and how they handled the invaders. Barry then spoke on the 3 years he was officer-in-charge of the Customs Border Control at Mangere Airport in the early 1970's and gave many instances of the "dramas " they had with incoming passengers

Music Appreciation and History: Jenny was our hostess in March and the programme was presented by Tina. "Facade" is a collection of poems by Edith Sitwell, with music composed by William Walton. We listened to a recording made in 2000 with Eleanor Bron and Richard Stilgoe as the reciters. David Lloyd-Jones conducted the Nash Ensemble.

Play reading: At our March meeting we completed reading excerpts and one act plays included in the book 'Versailles' by Kate Davis. Quite a different presentation of Louis and Marie Antionette. From a book entitled " Fill My Stocking" by Alan Titchmarsh we read, amid much laughter, the play "Pride and Prunejuice". It is a little like a pantomime based on the classic "Pride and Prejudice". A lot of fun really!!!

The Story of Art: We enjoyed another look at Shona McFarlane's work and a book about John Castle provoked discussion. A news item had us looking forward to seeing the Wallace Collection in its newly restored home. Patricia talked about the life and work of Alfred Sharpe, a watercolourist of the colonial period in N.Z. He was also an architect, a poet, a satirical columnist and a writer of hints for watercolour painters. Sharpe painted painstakingly detailed landscapes of Auckland and northern N.Z., and one of particular interest is "Pohutukawa", 1876. The tree can still be seen on the Takapuna foreshore. He was, unusually for his time, a conservationist, depicting scenes deploring the felling and clearing of native forests.

Travel: Patricia spoke to us of her 1980s trip of Silk Road adventures, led by Tim Round. It was enlightening and entertaining for us but at times during the trip, fraught, for Patricia who excels in telling jokes against herself. Travel was mainly by overnight train or mini bus with hotel stopovers plus the ODD flights. Commencing in Hong Kong, thence to Canton via Pearl river, flying to Xian to view the 'warriors'. Countryside and food varied considerably throughout the whole trip. On to the Asian-Russian states but not before being held at the border all day in appalling conditions simply because the group was one person short of the number of visas allocated to the group! Some of these states had become self governing but in others there were still hostilities with Russia. Women were noticeable by their absence outdoors in these mainly Muslim countries. Samarkand and flying over the snow covered Caucasus mountains to the Black sea then a circuitous route to Turkey were highlights for Patricia. . Our April meeting will be member's short stories.

Walking group: Walk 1 -From Freyberg Park we made a circuit through parks and walkways to East Coast Road, returning via a different route. At morning coffee we planned future walks. Walk 2 - meeting Rosedale hockey field Car Park then circuit via Unsworth Reserve and Rosedale Park south. We had lovely surprise with our former leader Robyn joining us as she was visiting from Christchurch.

World Religions: We all enjoyed a talk by Sheela who was born in Northern India but has spent the last 37 years in Scotland. Her mother was a strict Hindu with a strong belief in one God and that people should understand all cultures. Hindu's have a strong belief that each individual is responsible for their own actions. in non violence and in respect for elders. They have strong familial partnerships with the male children inheriting that responsibility. Sheela attended a Catholic school and won a scholarship to study for a Doctorate at Glasgow University. Her husband was born in Katmandu and they have a happy arranged marriage, but there was no dowry involved. We enjoyed discussing arranged marriages. Sheela now lives in Inverness, Scotland where her husband in a Doctor. They have two daughters.