

## Special Interest Group News December 2008

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### **Ancient civilisations:**

The "Hyksos" a nomadic, semitic people from western Asia, began their skirmishes into Egypt c.1730 BC culminating in conquest and rule from 1650-1567 when they were finally ousted. They brought with them the harnessed horse, the chariot and improved weaponry, plus culturally the vertical loom, lute, lyre, apple and olive. Women were regarded as men's equals being legally independent citizens who could decide their own affairs, own property, engage in commerce, make wills, bring lawsuits and were legally protected against physical abuse from their husbands. Children enjoyed their toys - balls, tops, dolls and animal figures with movable parts. The board game "Senet" has confirmed dating back to 3500 BC. The earliest known account of a full orchestra (including harp, flute and various wind instruments) performing a concert before a Pharaoh, dates from c.250 BC, where 600 musicians played simultaneously.

### **Anthropology:**

Patricia brought some of her collection of wonderful shells and gave a talk on their long history and many uses. You really had to be there to appreciate it. Then Patricia continued her research into early archaeology, telling of DNA discoveries into the development of Moa, Rhea and Kiwi etc., discovering that they flew here and then lost their ability to fly. She also talked about the development of mankind from Neanderthal to Modern Day man, finding that we are not the same species . . . until further research anyway.

### **Antiques and collectables:**

At the final meeting for the year we visited Coeur De La France in Browns Bay. As well as a large selection of French antiques, they also have a range of French goods including table linen, tapestries, lavender soaps and of course wine and berets. We then visited the Palmers Garden Centre Cafe for lunch and a browse at the plants and gifts. Next meeting the subjects will be mirrors and dressing table articles.

### **Art history & appreciation:**

We look forward to the last meeting (social) for the year and further viewing of exhibitions over our long hot summer.

### **Asian studies:**

While our lecturer, David, was away last month visiting Iran, we filled in with a video 'India - Cooking in the Danger Zone' followed by a Vietnamese lunch at 'Sapa'.

CHINA: Beijing's Underground City. In 1969 Mao Zedong ordered the construction of these underground bomb-shelters to house 40% of Beijing's population in the event of a Soviet attack. Modified shops, theatres, roller skating rinks, hotels, restaurants, schools, libraries, factories and warehouses etc. could be maintained at a constant 27deg.C. Today some of these rooms are used as youth hostels, shopping and business centres, silk and carpet outlets and for raising mushrooms and chickens. Tourists can enter through small shop frontages carrying signs "Underground City" in both Chinese and English.

### **Computers:**

This month Garry invited us to his house, where he gave a presentation, via laptop and TV screen, showing us how to set up a website. The first thing to do is to look at other websites, noting things that you like, e.g. background, layout, use of pictures. Talked about other web design extras like scrolling headlines etc. Dreamweaver Web design programme is the most popular professional one. To create the U3A website, Garry used NetObjects Fusion. It has great tools for setting up the pages and making them interactive. We watched as he set up a page for our computer group.

### **Creative writing:**

Our meeting this month will have stories with a Christmas theme written by members. This is to be followed by a Christmas afternoon tea.

### **Exploring art for fun:**

Exploring Art for Fun spent its November meeting - a week earlier than usual - at the NZ Sculpture OnShore 2008 Exhibition. This was the seventh exhibition, the third at Fort Takapuna, that has been held in aid of the New Zealand Womens Refuges. It was a big one - 116 works by 96 artists plus a display of children's sculpture inside the old Takapuna Fort buildings from local Bayswater and Devonport schools. As a result of visiting the exhibition, Exploring Art for Fun is considering also declaring itself an additional walking group as walking around the whole exhibition required a high level of athletic prowess in addition to a love of art. Our members showed that they had both these attributes in plenty and thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful work that was on display.

### **Family memoirs – Writing group:**

Our subject this month was "A Week At..." and covered such places as a trip on a Fairmile Cruiser around some of the Whitsunday Islands, including Brampton, Daydream, South Mole and Hayman Islands; a reunion in Tauramanui of a Parish Church and meeting up with old friends; a family holiday at Mimiwhangata at the D.O.C. camp; A visit to Raoul Island with the Botanical Society and a week at Norfolk Island with friends. We also learnt about a family heirloom called a Smoking Cap now held at Te Papa Museum. Next month we will meet at Rona's for a festive ending to the year. We have places available for new members to join our group.

### **Film appreciation:**

At their final meeting for 2008 our group celebrated Christmas by seeing *The Band's Visit*. The band, composed of members of the Egyptian police force, heads to Israel to play at the inaugural ceremony of an Arab arts center, only to find themselves lost in the wrong town. The band must rely on the kindness of strangers, which allows first-time director Kolirin to unwrap the idiosyncrasies of human relationships. Each gradually unpeels their emotional shield in the course of witty, almost comedic interplay peppered with both misunderstanding and sympathy. Mixed reactions from our members – but decidedly a quirky, wry film. Afterwards we enjoyed a delicious lunch at the cafe attached to the Pumhouse in Takapuna - recommended.

### **Français pour rire:**

In October, Bill discussed those going to the lunch in Beachhaven in December. We answered a question about who wrote *The Three Musketeers*. Alexandre Dumas. We read in parts from *Lecons 3 & 4* including the usage of "de" with the negative preceding the object of a sentence and further reading in French practice in turn. Moira gave a talk about France from the time of Louis XIV concerning the church and life and style in France up to the present. Moira used the library book "Culture & Customs of France" as her reference. We answered some questions in French relating to some pictures.

### **Geology:**

The group meets in a different member's home each month. Those of us who joined with Takapuna U3A Geology on the field trip to Northland are still on a 'high', having returned on Saturday - 16 people in all. We had a night in Kaikohe in order to visit the Waiwera Boulders and Lake Omapere, and across country to visit a wonderful kauri forest made very accessible via a DOC boardwalk. We spent two nights in Whangaroa to learn about the recently written-about Permian fossils off the coast, together with a walk over the hill from Tauranga Bay to see the fossils in Marble Bay. The two and a half hour boat trip was breathtaking. It was from there on to the Karikari Peninsula for a night and then on back roads from Taipa to Mangamuka Bridge, to drive over/alongside the famous (geologically) allochthon. An interesting sidetrack was a visit to Fern Flat Potteries in the middle of nowhere. Across then on the ferry to Rawene for a night in Opononi returning via Dargaville. The best part was the enjoyable company.

### **Literature group:**

Joyce gave a brief review of Spike Milligan's life, a biography by Norma Farnes his agent and a close friend for many years. This is a sympathetic account of a clever but at times troubled man. Norma Farnes was an encouraging and probably a good and steadying influence; recommended. Also Joyce's review of *Jane and the Man of the Cloth* is recommended. It is strictly a historical novel about Jane Austen. Shona recommended *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak & *An Execution in the Family: One Son's Journey*, by Robert Meerpol, the second son of The Rosenbergs.

### **Local history:**

Patricia Langford again kept us amused and entertained as she recounted her experiences of growing up on the North Shore in the 1950's. So many could relate to shared memories of similar times and happenings which made it an interesting morning.

### **Modern history:**

At our November meeting Ruth spoke on her recent trip to ALASKA and gave her impressions on modern times there and some of the past history including the purchase of Alaska from Russia and how the discovery of gold and later oil and gas has stimulated the growth of the State. George then gave us an interesting insight into living in London during the "Blitz" in WW2 and the terrible destruction of a great city.

### **Music appreciation & history:**

Members each brought a C.D. for a competition to identify composer, musician etc., after having heard only a short piece of the recorded music. We then ended our year with lunch at EFES Turkish Cuisine.

### **Play reading:**

At the October meeting we welcomed Barbara into the group. There are still a few places open for new members to join in 2009. The plays read on 28th were very different. Drama, greed and history featured in "The Patchwork Quilt" by Rachel Lyman Field. Characters in the farce "Five Birds in a Cage" by Gertrude Jennings, were extreme and provided much ridiculous humour.

**Travel:**

Our meeting was deferred to the "Snug" in the Knightsbridge Village, where Keri presented a talk on her trip to Borneo. This was followed by a Christmas lunch in the Village restaurant.

**Walking group:**

On a beautiful morning our first walk of the month was through Centennial Park and down to Campbells Bay to have our morning tea, while we watched tugs and dredges working off Mairangi Bay, on the new sewerage system. Our second walk was from Little Shoal Bay.

**World religions:**

Ruth spoke on Jainism which began in 400BC based on harmlessness and renunciation. There is no creative God but every living thing is divine. Their avoidance of any killing allowed them to become literate. Many schools, colleges and hospitals. Now spread to East Africa, Canada and U.S.A 2% in India. Margaret spoke on Sikhism which began in 1500 A.D. Sikhs are a warrior class protecting all humanity not specific people or religions. All people are equal as are men and women. Dress code for both is: uncut hair, cotton breeches, sword, bangle and comb. Now live also in East Africa, Hong Kong, Canada, USA, Britain and in the Pacific countries.