

U3A BROWNS BAY

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

NEWSLETTER December 2011

Fundamental to Browns Bay U3A is the active participation in interest groups

Ancient Civilisations

In 500 BC, the Persian Empire was at its zenith, and stretched from Asia Minor, through Mesopotamia and Afghanistan to India. Athenian support for a revolt by Ionian Greeks to the rule of Cyrus the Great brought retribution from the Persians in the form of an invasion of the Greek mainland and the battle of Marathon. Superior tactics and weaponry ensured a Greek victory and withdrawal of the Persian war machine, until the crowning of a new King ten years later. The Spartans, who declined involvement at Marathon were prominent in the final defeat of Persia. This would be known in Greece as a 'triumph of civilisation over despotic barbarism'. But Spartan jealousy of Athenian achievements led to conflict between these two states which had had a joint commitment against a common enemy. Two conspicuous historical figures of this era were Lysander of Sparta and Xenophon of Athens.

Anthropology

Continuing her talks on early drama, Patricia spoke of early Chinese and Japanese theatre. In China, actors carrying their props, make up etc. toured the country with plays of heroism and moral themes. Puppetry was popular with Rod puppets, Shadow puppets and String puppets. In Japan, at first themes for plays were more gentle and romantic but developed into a more martial type but returned to romance again and to the Noh Theatre, with its masks, dance and drum music. Puppets were also popular in Japan - Bun Raki puppets that need three people to work them and Kabuki puppets, which most importantly aim to be visually satisfying, with exciting music and brilliant colours.

Archaeology

At our last meeting of the year Marion and Maureen each gave a talk. Marion talked about the history of archaeology. It really became popular in the 18th century and only the wealthy people were connected to it. Today thousands of people study it throughout the world and what with radio carbon dating and DNA it is a very interesting field to be involved in. Maureen talked about her recent trip to a castle in Latvia. Cesis Castle had a mud moat which had interesting features in the castle including the dungeon, and a toilet. Maureen leaves our group we will miss her great talks but wish her well in her new group. To finish the meeting we had a shared lunch. Jasmine is the new convenor for 2012.

Art Pot Pourri - (2nd Tuesday 2pm)

Susan presented a talk on the life and works of Gwendolen Mary John (22 June 1876 - 18 Sept. 1939). John was a Welsh artist who worked in France for most of her career. She is noted for her still life works and for her portraits, especially of anonymous female sitters. John was an artist's model (and later the lover of) the sculptor August Rodin. Though John was once overshadowed by her popular brother, Augustus John, critical opinion now tends to view Gwen as the more talented of the two. Augustus himself predicted this reversal, saying, "In 50 years' time I will be known as the brother of Gwen John."

Classical Music

In November we had a very pleasant morning of music at Roy Urlic's home. We began by listening to the sound of the Toroa bird. We then heard Frederica von Strada singing **Song of the Shepherd** by Cantaloupe and **Oi Ayai**. Harpist Susan Drake's rendering of **Echos of a Waterfall** followed, then the NZSO, with Colleen Urlic on the piano playing **Lord of the Dance** with the Belmont Singers. Boy soprano Richard Boinsell singing **Dominique** in French and **Santa Lucia** in Italian was followed by the Budapest Girls Choir with **The Gypsy eats Cheese** by Zoltan Kodaly. The London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Karl Jenkins playing Vamp Latino was next. We then enjoyed a DVD showing Venice while a string orchestra played Italian baroque. Thank you Roy. The December meeting is at John and Jeanne's Home. We have room for more members.

Computers

Scam emails were coming into some member's inboxes from banks wanting to give them \$50 if they would partake in a survey about "how well they were doing". Just answer a few questions (including "what is your bank account #), and the \$50 would be yours! These scams are never ending, PLEASE DO NOT BE FOOLED! We were shown an all in one emergency torch, radio, led light and telephone charger unit which every household should have in NZ. They are available as solar powered, hand cranked, or both. Simply "Google" Solar Emergency Torch and you will have multiple selections with a host of options and prices. We celebrated our last meeting of the year with a lovely Christmas lunch at Helen and Lew's home. Thank you Helen for being an excellent convener.

Creative Audio-Visual

At our September meeting we had a good selection of AV's to watch that had been created by the group members. These included The Fireworks at the Opening of the RWC, Alan Gibb's Sculpture Park in South Head, Fay's Holiday Accommodation in France and Farming in The Mekong Delta in Vietnam. We discussed ideas for this year's Holiday Project and this will be finalised at the next meeting which is our Christmas meeting which will be held at Lois' home on 1st December.

Creative Writing

Only 4 members were available this month, but we did welcome in a new member Doreen Jones and look forward to her joining us all again next month. Last month for our stories we had all picked out a situation and a character from 2 piles, so that resulted in mismatched story lines, but the results were great. Veronica had a model and beach, Ruth had refugee and museum, Elaine had colonel and State Highway 1, and I had a clown and racecourse. All proved a challenge.

Film Appreciation

Our last meeting for the year, on 18 November, was the film "The Debt" followed by a Christmas lunch. The Debt is a historical spy thriller filled with suspense, and I think we all came out a little "shell shocked", but we would recommend

it. We had a very pleasant lunch all together at "Bolero" in Albany.

Français pour rire

Our reading was a letter from a French student who had successfully applied for a scholastic exchange to the French overseas territory of Tahiti. Bill then gave an overview of the rulers of France from Napoleon I to Napoleon III. He followed this with a more detailed study of the life of Napoleon III, who did much to give Paris its present appearance, with beautiful buildings and wide boulevards. After the break, our Swiss friend, Heidi, always a stimulating visitor, led us through a story of the village of Larzac in the South of France. Its inhabitants rebelled when their region was threatened with being turned into a huge military training ground. They even protested by taking their sheep to Paris, and camping with them under the Tour Eiffel.

Geology -

Our last meeting at the home of John and Fay was well attended, with active participation from all under the guidance of Tom. Carol organised our year-end lunch at Soljan's vineyard, Kumeu. Our February meeting will be at the home of David and Diana on the first and third Wednesdays.

History of World War Two -

How is it possible a cultured European nation allowed a political party to come to power and seek world domination with one of the most brutal conflicts in history? In 1918, Germany resented having to pay reparation to its former enemies. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1919 was a source of major dissatisfaction to all parties. Japan and Italy felt they were denied their 'just rights' for supporting the Allies. World economies were unbalanced by colossal debt incurred during the war. Angered at the way Germany had been treated, ex Army corporal Adolf Hitler joined a revolutionary group in 1919. His philosophy was based on anti-communism, anti-semitism and Germany's future destiny to expand and dominate. With some political manoeuvring and thuggery, in 1932 he became 'Führer' (Leader) and overcame the democratic government to establish a police state with all its implications.

Inventors & Inventions

Roy hosted our last meeting for the year and gave a very interesting presentation on the life of Richard Pearse. He set the tone by showing a clip of a film made in the 50's which claimed to replicate the first powered flight in New Zealand (and indeed the world), on 31 March 1903. In true 50's style the film was 'slow' in action but it gave a good insight into Richard, his life, and his obsession with flight. After the film Roy enlarged on what the film covered and compared Richard's achievements with those of the Wright Brothers who had evidence of their first powered flight, something New Zealand historians would love to discover about Richard Pearse.

Literature group

Sharing Titles for Holiday Reading! **Fallen Giants** by Ken Follett (1st book in a Trilogy), - **The Churchills** by Mary Lovell, - **The Conductor** by Sarah Quigley (set in St Petersburg), - **Snowdrop** by A.B. Miller (through the eyes of an English lawyer), - **Story of a New Zealand River** by Jane Mandar (Kaipara Harbour area), - **Before I Go To Sleep** by S.J. Watson (new author), - **The White Masai** by Corinne Hoffman, - **Survival** by Stuart Diver (true story), - **Cheese Fair** by Clarissa Dickson Wright, - **Rifling Through My Dreams**, - **Three Men in a Boat** (series) by Jerome K Jerome, **Untold Stories** by Alan Bennett (author of History Boys), **Need to Talk about Kevin** by Lionel Shriver (heart

rending stories / a page turner), - **The Salt Road** by Jane Johnson, - **The Empires Edge** by Robert B. Jackson.

Local History

At our November meeting we had snippets from various members which covered: A Station owner Poet: A relative taking the Queen's shilling to fight in the Crimea: Bean Rock Lighthouse & its history: Childhood holidays on Rangitoto: the Waiuku Museum: Thomas Bracken, writer of God Defend New Zealand, lived on the shore: Sailing on the Ted Ashby, and cruising up the Waihou River. What a variety of topics. Next Meeting 13th February 2012. New Members welcome. Ph Des.

Making History

MUHAMMAD (AD 570?-632) was a prophet whose life and teachings form the basis of the Islamic religion. Muslims believe he was the last messenger from God, thereby completing the sacred teachings of such earlier prophets as Abraham, Moses and Jesus. They respect Muhammad but do not worship him. In about AD 610 Muhammad began to receive revelations from Allah. He dictated these verses to his followers. Several years after his death a committee collected these revelations and produced a master copy called the Koran. Muhammad and his companions also laid the foundations for Islamic society based on the Sunnah - his life, sayings and behaviour - and the Sharia - the code of Islamic law.

Modern History

Frank gave a talk entitled "Ethiopia – Then and Now". Ethiopia, the first officially Christian country, has existed from the time of Solomon (900's BCE) as a conglomeration of local kingdoms ruled by a dominant emperor. With almost continuous local wars for most of its history, it was isolated from European influence. In the 1800's Italy invaded but was defeated. In the 1900's Ethiopia ceded the Red Sea coastal area to Britain, France and Italy in return for international recognition under Emperor Haile Selassie. Italy invaded and conquered in 1936 but during WW2, Britain expelled the Italians and reinstated Haile Selassie. He was deposed in 1974 after a devastating famine. The resultant brutal Marxist government brought more famine in the 1980's and it was overthrown in 1991. The current democratic government is relatively stable but the country remains very poor. Perhaps its greatest contribution to history was the discovery of coffee.

Music Appreciation and History

Music Appreciation: We met at Jennifer Lee's home for our last meeting of the year. We were very enjoyably entertained by Lionel Reekie - singing and playing his piano accordion, and we lustily joined in the singing of songs from Shows etc. We then enjoyed a luscious lunch together. We meet again in 2012, 3rd Tuesday in February at Susan's home. **We have room for 2 new members.**

Music - Mainly Classical Valerie described her family's musical history - from a choir in England to India in 1796 - Writing down the music to Bengali tunes and forming a small choir. They then moved to Auckland in the 1880's playing a part in the musical life of the city. Another ancestor came from Sweden in the 1870's where he had been awarded a medal from the King for his musical abilities. He founded the Whangarei Town Orchestra. Scott's topic was Russian music starting with a 'gusli' excerpt and ending with 'Kalinka' sung by the Red Army Chorus. Along the way we listened to music by Glinka, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Chaliapin in song, a balalaika orchestra and, surprisingly, Rossini's Factotum and a Bach P & F. Next meeting, Our December meeting will be at Terry's home with a BYO lunch and all members requested

to let us listen to 5 to 10 minutes of their favourite music.
Note early start time of 12.00 noon.

Play Reading

In October we met as usual at the Community Centre in Browns Bay, we had three new members and four apologies. We read "Master of the House" and "Numbers at the Gate". Numbers was a criminal and he and his girlfriend were at The Pearly Gates, some of the "cast" were Angels! Lastly, we read "Christmas at Grandma's". In November, we went to the RSA in Browns Bay for our Christmas lunch and we all ate ourselves silly. We then staggered back to the Community Centre to read two plays kindly chosen by Patsy: Mr Icky, and Campbell of Kilmhor, in which Judy excelled herself as the officer trying to find Stewart Campbell. A bitter-sweet end to the year! Next meeting will be in February on 28th.

Travel

At our last meeting for the year, Shirley finished her talk about Israel. Beside the Dead Sea is Masada, a sacred site for the Jewish people. The plateau is reached by cable car where the remains are. The views are over the Dead Sea. Next stop was Qumran to see the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947. Driving along the Negev Desert there were military bases and an interesting Aviation Museum. At the kibbutz,

Sde Boker there is a university and Ben Gurion's house and grave. At Eilat she visited an underwater observatory. Timnah was the site of ancient copper mines and stunning desert rock formations and coloured sands. The journey finished at Tel Aviv. We had Christmas lunch at the Bays Club. Many thanks to Robin for his leadership this year.

Walking -

December meet for a walk in the Stanley Bay area. Approximately 2 hours.

World Religions

Our World Religions Group enjoyed a "heavenly outing" at the Stardome on Wednesday 9th of November. The plan was to have a picnic tea at Cornwall Park first but the weather intervened, as it does, and the picnic tea was at my place. Never-the-less we all had a good time with a shared meal and lively discussion around the dining table that could not have been better if it was planned. The presentation at the Stardome was on the summer sky and was very interesting (stiff necks and all) even though summer was decidedly absent on this occasion and stymied our plans to have a look through the courtyard telescopes. We are planning to meet on January 11th and will each be presenting how different cultures and countries celebrate Christmas and the New Year
