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## Report of general meeting

Another great talk by a scientist from the Landcare Research Institute! Dr Jamie Wood told us about the moa, and this time Dr Matt McGlone told us about the prehistoric transformation of New Zealand by the Polynesian settlers. Where did these Polynesian settlers come from, when did they arrive, and what impact did they have on New Zealand's bird life and forest cover? Dr McGlone led us through the evidence, and the controversies - sometimes bitter - surrounding these questions.



Captain Cook got it right in 1769 when he wrote in his ship's log that the Maori people came from the West, probably Malay/East Indies, but later ideas were quite fanciful to the modern mind. They were variously held to be Jews (Samuel Marsden), Egyptians (Thomas Kendall), Aryans (Ed Treagar), Peruvians (Thor Heyerdahl), or Phoenicians (Prof Barry Fell). Recent DNA evidence says Cook had it right all along.

The impact of these settlers was huge: one third of NZ's forest area was burned by the time of European arrival, 58 land birds and 23 smaller birds were extinct and some sea mammals were gone; all these, along with an assortment of snails, insects and lizards and a bat. How long did it take the settlers, and the rats they brought with them, to achieve this devastation? The pollen and radiocarbon records show that the transformation was well advanced by 1350 AD. Was their impact fast and immediate, or the culmination of a longer period of settlement?



This has been the most controversial question of all, with radiocarbon dates at the centre of the debate. Matt related the pitched battle as scientists debated which samples should be relied on – carbon from burned forests or cooking fires, or rat bones from nesting sites of laughing owls (now extinct), whether laboratory analyses were accurate, who should have access to sampling sites so that results can be cross-checked. Re-examinations of some earlier sites of radiocarbon material have shown unacceptable disturbance, and there is evidence of laboratory error in some of the radiocarbon dating.

Who would have thought that dates from ancient rat-gnawed seeds would provide the crucial evidence? Rats arrived in New Zealand in 1280 AD (+/- 70 years), and this ties in with the earliest archeological date. The evidence now all “clicks into place”: Polynesians arrived in New Zealand in 1280 AD (+/- 70 years).



So, a great talk, and we all learned a lot about New Zealand's settlement prehistory. But this was not just about our prehistory: it was equally about how science works.

We thank Dr McGlone for his enormously entertaining and insightful talk. *Keith McNaughton*

## From the committee

### Website competition



**We have a winner!**

Thank you very much to all those who entered our Website Wizard Quiz. We are sure you are now experts at finding your way around our new website. The winner's entry was drawn from all correct entries received. Congratulations to Ron Grant who has won two tickets to a film of his choice at the Cathay Cinema with the additional treat of coffee at the Cafe Cinema.

Our thanks to the Cathay Cinema and Cafe Cinema for their generous sponsorship of our competition.

Our website is beginning to make us more visible to visitors from U3A networks elsewhere in New Zealand and overseas. Two couples from the UK attended our last general meeting and one couple came along as guests on the history group's visit to the Paihia Haven of History. We love to welcome members from other U3As and hear of their experiences.

### Group news

Three new groups started in February and all three got off to a good start. The members of the *Do It Yourself* group, after a discussion with John, their tutor, are all ready to bring their own projects along to their next workshop session. The *Victorians and Oscar Wilde* group met at Tom and Margaret Lyndsay's home where animated discussion was sparked by the topic of the Industrial Revolution and the ways in which it changed the world. You can read all about the third new group, *Sketching for Beginners* in the group reports later in this newsletter.

We are still taking expressions of interest for a second *Art House Films* group so please let me know if you are interested.

*Margaret Rasmussen*

### Special events

Pam Jenkins, our publicity officer, with help from members, is organising two displays in March.

#### Senior Expo

This will be held in the social centre at the Kerikeri Retirement Village on 8<sup>th</sup> March from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm. Pam will be speaking at 11.30 am in the chapel on the topic, *It's never too late to try something new*. Why not bring along a friend who may be interested in learning about U3A?

#### Library Display

Please tell your friends to check out our display in the Procter Library from 24<sup>th</sup> March to 6<sup>th</sup> April.

### Newsletter survey

You will have noticed that we have tried a number of different formats for our newsletter recently. We will be sending out a survey soon because we are keen to know what our members prefer. Please give this some thought over the next few weeks.

### New members

Welcome to Valerie Cadell, Michael and Beverley Deverell, Lorraine Jamieson, Mara Keeble, Andrew Thomson and Isobel Wright. We hope you enjoy U3A. With so many new members we will send out an updated membership list soon.

### Committee roles

The committee is pleased to announce that Pam Jenkins has agreed to continue as Secretary. We thank her for the great job she is doing in this important role. Now we are now looking for someone to take on the role of Publicity Officer.

## From the President, Lesley McNaughton

I hope you're enjoying getting back into your U3A activities after the summer break. It's so nice seeing friends again and catching up on their news. We're all looking forward to another great year.

Our general meeting with Dr Matt McGlone certainly got us off to a wonderful start. Matt kept us alert and chuckling as he talked about how modern science eventually revealed the date of arrival of Polynesian settlers in New Zealand. You can read Keith's report about this on page one.

Our programme of home-meetings of interest groups is the heart of U3A BOI. We now have 27 of these groups meeting monthly, including two that started in December and four that started in February. There's been very positive feedback from all of them. I'd particularly like to thank our facilitators who continue to put in a great deal of effort and so are making it all possible. Margaret Rasmussen, as group co-ordinator, deserves particular praise. She has done a huge amount of work setting up, coordinating and supporting all of our groups.

As usual, our Group Schedule is attached. You will notice that many of our groups are full. I hope you didn't miss out on a group you really wanted to join! It is important that you read the newsletter as soon as it arrives in your inbox, and contact the Group Convenor straight away if a new group interests you. Margaret is always open to forming new groups when a facilitator can be found, and she will advertise them in the newsletter. Once there are enough applicants to make a group viable, Margaret will liaise with the facilitator and applicants to find a suitable slot in the calendar. If you'd like to join existing groups, contact the facilitators and they will fit you in if space is available. *Lesley*

## Featured groups

### Sketching for Beginners

The first meeting of this new U3A group was held at Cherry Park House on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February with a contingent of fifteen members plus the facilitator, Mike Dee. Mike is a retired art teacher, ceramics tutor and museum officer. Members of the group have been asked to provide koha for the very reasonable hire of the venue and provision of that absolutely essential component, morning tea, arranged by U3A Group Convener, Margaret Rasmussen, a member of the group.



The aim of the course is to develop a basic representational drawing ability in six sessions; that is, to be able to draw physical objects from direct observation. Some members who were apprehensive about their ability to learn to draw were reassured by Mike's explanation that, like reading, writing and arithmetic, drawing is a learnable skill, if practiced regularly – repetition being the key ingredient to acquiring any practical ability. While the subject matter will be still life, the underlying principles and abilities also apply to landscape and figure drawing and these could be the focus of future sessions.

The lesson began with technical exercises to develop hand-eye coordination; the ability to move the pencil where the outline of the object to be drawn dictates. Judging by their intense concentration, everybody enjoyed the challenge. The exercises at first emphasised accuracy, rather than expression and were focused on a two dimensional format. Repeated parallel lines were extended by developing directional and tonal variations. Finally these newly acquired skills were applied to a real object – a heavily lined, patterned seashell.

Next month's session will focus on how to see the world anew for the purpose of drawing it; how to see a familiar object as a completely abstract shape so that it is drawn as it appears, not as we 'know' it looks – no pressure! *Mike Dee*

## Local History Group (Kerikeri)

Our first outing, on 18<sup>th</sup> February, was a visit to the Haven of History in Paihia. It was a well-attended meeting and, with the invaluable knowledge of our guide, Elizabeth Ludbrook, we all now have more understanding of the life and times of the early missionaries to the Bay of Islands, led by Henry Williams. The Haven of History, on the site of the Paihia Mission (just past the church at 28 Marsden Road), is an open site with excellent description boards. I am sure we will be going back as individuals for a second look, and to visit the history walk in the gardens of the Williams House, now the Paihia Library. We were planning to go to the garden on this visit – but with so much to look at and discuss, we ran out of time, so we decided to conclude the meeting in a local café with excellent coffee.



Local History group members enjoying stories of the Paihia Mission Station

The group is described as an ‘out and about’ group. In general members make their own way to a rendezvous point (car-pooling is encouraged) and people are responsible for their own admission fees, ferry charges etc. We are a fairly hardy group so, barring cyclones or tsunamis, it is anticipated that a pre-arranged group meeting will go ahead. However, if such extreme weather is expected on a scheduled meeting day, we will meet indoors to plan future meetings and discuss local history or items of general historical interest. When a group of like-minded people gather together, there is always something of interest to discuss.

Because we are not dependent on the size of private homes for meetings, we are not generally limited in numbers, so you are welcome to join us for our ‘out and about’ meetings; just let me know so you can be included on the email list for meeting time and place, suggested background reading, research websites, and any other information pertaining to the meeting.

*Judy Ramsey*

## Shakespeare



Helen Mirren and Brian Stirner in *As You Like It*, filmed in 1978 at Glamis Castle. All except two of the plays were filmed at the BBC Television Centre.

Our two Shakespeare groups were formed to watch the “Shakespeare Collection.” This series of William Shakespeare's plays were produced and filmed for television by the BBC between 1978 and 1985. The 37 DVD's are renowned for their loyalty to the text, and the BBC utilised the best theatrical and television directors and actors for each play. Well known names such as Claire Bloom, Frank Middlemass, David Gwillim, Clive Dunn, Helen Mirren and Eric Porter, to name just a few, appear. These great actors were much younger then but they really bring the characters to life.

We enjoy listening to Shakespeare's fabulous language spoken with the rhythm and rhyme he intended. The speech is often fast but viewing the plays with subtitles allows us to check any word or phrases we don't catch.

Two groups meet once a month to view and enjoy a play. We are now half way through the collection. Both groups would welcome new members.

*Margaret Lindsay*

**Western Civilisation Group**

We meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month at 10 am and begin with a cup of tea or coffee and then settle down to watch a DVD. These are based on the book *Civilisation – a personal view* by Kenneth Clarke. They are narrated by Lord Clarke and cover the effects of art, architecture, literature and music on Western civilisation. We intersperse these sessions with some episodes of Simon Schama’s *Power of Art*, eg. Rembrandt and Bernini.



C19<sup>th</sup> staircase in the Residenz Wurzburg

So far we have been transported to Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century before Christ, to Rome with its influence on the people of Europe and to the holy island of Iona. We have visited Medieval times, the Renaissance, the splendour that was Rome, and noted the influence of the great Dutch artists. We are shown wonderful works of art, magnificent buildings and people who contributed in some way to the advancement of humanity. All this, together with Kenneth Clarke’s knowledgeable interpretation and often accompanied by appropriate music, makes for an extremely entertaining presentation.

Friendly discussion follows; it is always interesting to hear different views and ideas.

Notes on each episode are sent out a few days prior to the meeting with references to books and links to websites which may be of interest but there is no pressure, no homework, and no requirements other than to sit back and enjoy.

*Judy Barrett*

**French conversation group**



Three French speakers met in February for our first meeting of 2014. Sometimes, being a small group has its advantages as everyone gets a chance to talk. Two of us are planning trips to France or to a French speaking country within the next few months, so having the opportunity to speak the language helps us to keep fluent. We all agreed that reading in French is also an excellent way of extending one’s vocabulary.

Apart from our holiday plans, we discussed books we had read and films we had seen over the past few weeks. We find plenty to talk about as we are all actively involved in local clubs and organisations. We always round off our meetings with tea or coffee and calories!

New members are always welcome to join us, but a reasonable command of French is required as this is not a group for beginners. Our next meeting will be on March 4<sup>th</sup>.

*Stephanie Beggs*

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