



University of the Third Age
The Age of Active Retirement: People Exchanging Knowledge

Newsletter November 2025

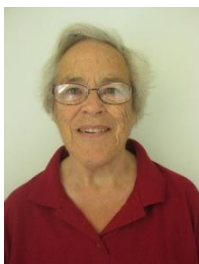
Our next meeting is on Monday 17th November and our speaker is David Hodgson – Extraordinary New Zealanders in WW1 – Harold Gillies

David has been a secondary school teacher for 40 years, teaching mainly History, Social Studies and English. David worked for an educational tour company in England in the mid-1980's which involved historical, literary and cathedral tours around Britain.

Harold Gillies is widely recognised as the father of modern plastic surgery. The large number of facial injuries cause by WW1 trench warfare provided the opportunity for Gillies to lead the collaborative response that would allow thousands of disfigured men to resume more normal lives once the conflict had ended. What groundbreaking techniques did Gillies perfect? What differentiated Gillies from contemporary surgeons?

Also a reminder to put in your diary is for our Christmas lunch on 15th December, which will be held after our final meeting of the year. Our first meeting for 2026 is on the 16th January.

Message from the President



Those of you at the last meeting will remember that I appealed for a few more committee members. Three of the current ones are leaving for good reasons at the end of their term and during this year two people offered their services for 2026. That brings us to eight committee members for next year, but it would be much more comfortable for everyone if we could reach 11 or 12. Then some jobs could have a backup person or someone to share the responsibility. Often people are away on holiday, looking after grandchildren or sick. Knowing there is another person who can take over saves a lot of worry. Please consider seriously whether you could help for a couple of years.

There is only one short meeting each month to check that things are going smoothly and your presence could make sure that the group continues for a little longer.
Let me know if you are willing to help.

Information about Previous Meetings

The speaker was Dr Amy Scott talking on Literacy Opportunities in NZ Today

Amy is senior lecturer in the Child Wellbeing Research Institute of Canterbury University. This is principally concerned with reading, writing and language development of young children. She is the National Implementation Lead for the Better Start Literacy Approach which had to be implemented in all primary schools from 1 st January this year. This means for 1,000 schools involving 160,000 children. Results comparing schools using it showed a marked improvement for children over those not involved. It seems to be especially helpful for Māori and Pasifika children.

PIRLS Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, is an international assessment conducted every five years that measures reading, comprehension and literacy worldwide for 10-year-olds. NZ had only 71% proficiency.

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science skills to meet real-life challenges. New Zealand scored lower than England, Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore and is still trending slightly downwards. The test results could be skewed by the timing of 2021 testing just after Covid and the selection of schools chosen.

Structured Literacy is a term created by dyslexia teachers for the methods they use. The skills are taught in a planned sequence of sounds, simple words, reading, spelling, sentences and understanding. It goes from learning to read, to reading to learn. English has 44 phonemes, (English sounds), and 222 graphemes (spellings). 50% of words can be spelt from sounds, 36% are almost predictable except for one letter (e.g. knee) and 10% from their meaning.

A final comment said that if a child is taught ten words it only knows 10 words. If you teach it ten sounds it can use 350 3-sound words, 4320 4-sound words and 21650 5-sound words.

INTEREST GROUP DETAILS

Below is the list of U3A Pegasus Interest Groups, their convenors and contact details. If you would like to join any of the groups, please contact the convenor

ADVENTURES IN TRAVEL

Meets monthly in members' homes on 1st Tuesday of the month at 3pm in members' homes. Contact Lyn Russell 021 2388 788
Email: nylrus1951@gmail.com

ART APPRECIATION

Meets monthly, 2nd Friday of the month.
Contact Helen Harkness

BOOK DISCUSSION

Ph 384 2890 Email

helenharkness294@gmail.com

Meets monthly after the U3A lecture, 3rd Monday of the month in the Mt Pleasant Community Centre. Contact Mary Lynch email granmarylynch12@gmail.com or Judy Eden edenjudith@xtra.co.nz

(This group is now full.)

CAFÉ GROUP

Meets monthly, 2.30pm on Tuesday of the week following 3rd Monday of the month. Contact Jenny Long jennylong@xtra.co.nz 384 8463.

CANTERBURY HISTORY

Meets monthly, 2nd Monday of the month.

Contact Judy Calder

Ph 384 1269 Email judycalder@hotmail.com

CYCLING GROUP

Meets monthly, 2nd Wednesday.

Contact Jane Cowan-Harris Email:

janechbythesea@gmail.com, Mob 021 043 5342

GARDEN GROUP

Meets 4th Monday of the month. A mixture of speakers, garden visits and 'tea & cuttings'.

Contact: Gaynor Button Email:

buttonmg@gmail.com

GEOLOGY/BOTANY

Meets twice a month on 1st Monday at Redcliffs Bowling Centre and 3rd Wednesday for an outing. Contact Pat Whitman Ph 384 3475

Email patwandpate@gmail.com

SCRABBLE

Meets fortnightly Tuesdays 1.30pm.

Contact Alison Harrington Ph 022 307 4039

Email: alison.harrington@outlook.co.nz

INTEREST GROUPS COORDINATOR

Mary Lynch Email:

granmarylynch12@gmail.com

INTEREST GROUP UPDATES

Adventures in Travel

The Adventures in Travel meeting in November met at Robin and Heather's to hear of their adventures earlier this year up in the North Island where they went to the Bridge to



Nowhere and journeyed along the Forgotten World Railway.

The Bridge to Nowhere was built in 1935 to improve access to the remote Mangapurua Valley for returned WW1 soldiers who were allocated land by the Government, however the

settlement failed and was abandoned in 1942 due to remoteness of the valley, steep bush covered hillsides and extreme difficulty in getting any stock on the land, It is now a popular tourist destination and we travelled by boat up the Whanganui River to the Mangapurua Valley and then a 1 hour walk up the valley to the bridge. There is evidence of abandoned houses, farm buildings and even a school.



The Forgotten World Rail journey is a 142km rail trip from Stratford to Taumarunui which takes 2 days travelling in rail carts which were converted from golf carts. There are 24 tunnels, 90 bridges with the overnight stop at the Whangamomona Hotel. The rail carts are self driven with strict instructions to maintain a respectable distance from the cart in front. The journey takes you through changing areas of land from flat farmland, thick bush covered hill areas and river valleys.

Art Appreciation Group - October

It was less than a two minute walk from Atawhai Cafe to Sculpture Festival 2025 being held at The Arts Centre Great Hall and North Quad. Having enjoyed the previous year's Festival, we wondered if the new curators could match it. They selected over 350 works by 56 NZ artists- sculpture, mixed media, ceramic, glass and jewellery. Generally modestly priced, this time proceeds from the sale of items supported both the artist and The Arts Centre.

Just two examples are Dunedin's Mark Cowden's "Ribbon" 3/20"sculptured by folded paper giving a 3 dimensional look that changed colour and pattern as you moved in front of it.



With nearly 30 years of pottery behind her, Fiona Tunnicliffe's clay "Patchwork Donkey" was just one of the beautifully executed humorous animals she created. (see photo) The 2025 Festival was definitely up to standard!



Canterbury History Group

November visit: We visited the lovely old wooden St Marks Church in Greenpark, which has been a feature in the community since 1881. Designed by Benjamin Mountfort, this St Marks has served its rural community since its opening. Now it is affiliated to the Lincoln parish, but still holds three services each month. We heard stories of long ago, how farming families had to complete their morning's milking rounds before the church service could start. It was a moveable beginning time. Families worshipped together and had their own pews. One of our speakers said, "Our children had a wonderful life growing up here in the country. They knew nearly everyone in the community, they learned how to milk, drive a tractor, shear a sheep, swim in the local pool and found themselves related to many others in their classroom. It was a fulfilling time and we all helped each other out when needed."



Down the road we drove, into the old Greenpark school grounds. The school lost its role (and roll) when the Education Department closed it due to declining pupil numbers. Now the school is re-purposed by an amazing Dutch family who purchased the property and turned it into an events centre where groups are welcome to stay on site, cook, play, learn and have time out. As part of their purpose, they run a community food bank with a team of volunteers. We were welcomed with a

magnificent morning tea and signs of boundless energy as the speakers told us of how they serve this rural community, that appears to be located in the middle of nowhere.

Garden Group

Our October outing included two garden visits – one to Stoneycrop and the other to Rhodo Direct, both in West Melton.



Stoneycrop was created by Brian and Helen as an easy care, easy access garden with raised gardens and wide paths.

This allows Brian, who was injured in the PGG building collapse, to continue enjoying gardening together just as much as

ever. The garden looked magnificent with so much colour



abounding from the Rhododendrons – many of which Brian had cultivated to create his own plants named after his children, peonies and roses. Afternoon tea was provided for us.

Rhodo Direct is now owned and operated by Lisa Williams and her husband who originally went to buy some rhodos but ended up buying the business. They also grow the 'Pine Nut' tree which have been underplanted with Truffles. Lisa is a passionate gardener with her team and demonstrated to us how she removes the finished flowers to encourage further blooms for next year. Her tip was to use Vegetable Oil on your bare fingers to prevent the sticky residue from the Rhodos. A very timely demonstration with all our own Rhodos finishing flowering now.

Our November meeting will be a luncheon at Strathlachlan Gardens, Doyleston.

Geo/Botany Group

Rusty Acres is a garden about 30 minutes away from Christchurch at Mandeville. It is run by Allan O'Loughlin and his partner Andrea. Allan is a sculptor in steel with over 80 pieces on display at various spots round the garden. He has a strange imagination and many items



are distorted in some way. It was a very interesting trip.

3rd November 2025 **Toxic Plants**

Prof Ian Shaw

Ian Shaw told us about many of our common garden plants that are poisonous. Eating some of them could be fatal, like the berries off the yew tree. The flesh is OK but the



hidden black seed inside is very poisonous. There are very many poisonous plants and he only quoted a few, oleander, lupins,



periwinkle and the swan plant were some of them.

For all these poisonous plants, the toxins are a defence mechanism to prevent animals or insects eating them. In some cases, the poisons can be useful treatments for cancer.

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