



## July 2021, Newsletter Two

Since the last U3A newsletter (Feb 2021), discussions in a dozen dwellings around Golden Bay have delved deeply into a diversity of topics. Some of these are described here, but – alas! – the talent of the various theme leaders is not always reflected in their skill at replying to emails, so you'll be hearing only about a few of these.

There have been three visiting speakers so far this year (see later), and another five are on the way. Whew, that's a lot for one year! Open to all were four well-attended TED talks, held in the St Johns Rooms.

For information that is updated more regularly than the annual 2 or 3 newsletters, go to the website <https://u3agoldenbaymohua.org.nz/>. If you haven't yet figured out how to access the website, find a grandchild or borrow one from a friend.

### Visiting Speakers so far this year

- **Nikki Turner, 23<sup>th</sup> April**

Golden Bay was immensely privileged in being visited by one of the top New Zealand authorities in the field of immunisation. Her topic was the safety and effectiveness of Covid vaccines. Her talk was widely advertised to the general public in the hopes that a number of anti-vaxxers in the community would attend and hear a message alternative to the Alternative Facts that they glean from cyberspace. This hope was partly justified. Anti-vaxxers did indeed attend, but change their minds? [Insert cynical laughter here].

Of the 120 or so attendees, perhaps half were U3A members. One U3A person there was heard to say "that was the best – the very best – talk I have ever heard!" Also, Nikki had a disarming habit of thanking every questioner and praising the question (however inane it seemed to the rest of us).

In anticipation of possible conflict between the factions, strict protocols were observed. Under the magisterial leadership of Paul Taylor, no heckling was allowed. And during Question Time, no statements were to be made. At the very end, one young person asked for a show of hands. Who was already vaccinated, or planning to be so? Many, many people. Who was not intending to get a jab? 20-25 people. (Following such a talk, an observer might despair!) Perhaps we would have got the same show of hands if we had asked about the Moon Landings, the Twin Towers or even the spherical shape of the Earth?

- **Gill Wratt, 28<sup>th</sup> May**

Gill could have talked entertainingly about many topics, such as the Cawthron Institute, Project Janszoon or even mountain biking, but she stuck to her advertised topic – Antarctica. She talked about the science projects that are taking place there, and the international treaty that allows it to continue as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science.

She went through the various international machinations that had enabled the Treaty to exist. Originally, there were seven claimants to the territory (including New Zealand) and 12 signatories, but the 47 non-claimant countries either do not recognize the claims of others, or have not stated their positions. The relevance of this was not lost on the audience, for Antarctica is a working prototype for outer space and the real estate on the Moon.

- **Euan Mason, 18<sup>th</sup> June**

Euan honoured Golden Bay by leaving his professorial role at Canterbury University to spend four wintry days with us. For members of the Astronomy Group, he led an enjoyable evening of star-watching using two telescopes that he had contributed. He managed to see a few of the Bay's sights (such as Milnthorpe) before the rain descended. One evening was spent on his guitar, jamming with some of our talented Golden Bay musicians.

But his public talk was all about astronomy, this being one of his major hobbies. (Unusual for a professor of Forestry!) Comet McNaught was his first slide, an image that he had taken himself, and that had graced the pages of the U.S. magazine National Geographic. Then followed with a discussion about galaxies, how these varied in shape and size, and how they were formed. The impressive extent of his knowledge was fully demonstrated when it came to question time. There was very little he couldn't answer.

## Speakers yet to come

- **Dr. Bevan Grant, 23<sup>rd</sup> July**

The title of his talk is "Living Forever or Die Trying". Should be interesting, particular for us old farts.

- **Geoff Bertram, 10th September.**

Geoff is going to analyse NZ's electrical system in the context of climate change.

- **Chris Bennett, 8th October**

Chris is from Golden Bay and he is going to discuss his affordable housing project.

- **Julian Maclaren, 12th November**

(I'm sure I've heard that name somewhere). Julian is going to talk on Artificial Intelligence.

- **Paul Sangster, 10<sup>th</sup> December**

Paul, a local well known to everybody, is to talk of the history of Golden Bay.

## Do you have an idea for a possible U3A speaker for our public talks?

The U3A organising committee will soon begin putting our programme of public talks together for next year (2022), and we are looking for ideas for interesting speakers. We have been appreciative of members who have helped us develop our programme in the past (including a few of the speakers this year), and we look forward to receiving new ideas for next year.

U3A's focus is on educational topics, which can come from many fields, including science, history, medicine, politics, book authors and artists. We typically offer 5 – 8 public talks per year, and depending on funding available, we try to have about half of these talks provided by nationally-recognised speakers from outside of Golden Bay.

Our U3A offers to pay for out-of-town speakers' flights and accommodation costs, although many speakers are hosted at one of our members' homes. Unfortunately, we haven't the funds to pay speakers an honorarium.

If you have an idea for a public speaker, please contact Marian Vlaar ([marian.vlaar@gmail.com](mailto:marian.vlaar@gmail.com)), who will bring the idea to our next U3A committee meeting. If the committee decides to go forward with the idea, a committee member will be in touch with both you and the possible speaker.

## The Interest Groups

What are they? They are the essence of U3A. Now that you have retired, you need to exercise your mind as well as your body. Use it or lose it. While listening to others is good, it is still possible to vegetate with words and pictures washing over you. There is nothing like presenting a subject to force you to think! When you join a group, you will normally be expected to volunteer as presenter for a session, perhaps once a year.

We are always seeking new ideas for interest groups. If you are prepared to start a group off, bravo! If you would like to start a group, but don't know how, consult the website and/or Margaret Maloney. If you have a good idea, but don't want to organise it yourself, tell us anyway.

Most of the 15 Interest Groups are full, meaning that the homes where the meetings are held cannot accommodate more people. (If you want to join a group that is full, see later).

Existing Study Groups July 2021		
Subject	Convenor	Vacancies?
The Classics	Marian Vlaar 525 8167 <a href="mailto:marian.vlaar@gmail.com">marian.vlaar@gmail.com</a>	
Music Appreciation	Sheila Climpson. 525 385 <a href="mailto:ashclimpson@gmail.com">ashclimpson@gmail.com</a> and Charles Naylor <a href="mailto:chaspam30@gmail.com">chaspam30@gmail.com</a>	None
Films	John Pemberton. 525 9125 <a href="mailto:john.pemberton47@gmail.com">john.pemberton47@gmail.com</a>	None
New Democracy	Peter Riley <a href="mailto:peterrobinriley@gmail.com">peterrobinriley@gmail.com</a> and Pat Ballard <a href="mailto:kdpballard@xtra.co.nz">kdpballard@xtra.co.nz</a>	None

Prehistoric mysteries	Piers Maclaren. 525 7440 <a href="mailto:piersmaclaren@gmail.com">piersmaclaren@gmail.com</a>	None
Art history: Early 20th C Architecture	Jocelyn Tracey 525 9125 <a href="mailto:jocelyn.tracey@outlook.com">jocelyn.tracey@outlook.com</a> and Margaret Maloney 524 8699 <a href="mailto:m.maloney@xtra.co.nz">m.maloney@xtra.co.nz</a>	None
Art history: Early Renaissance to Impressionism	Rosamund Arthur and Don Mead. 524 8130 <a href="mailto:don.mead@gmail.com">don.mead@gmail.com</a>	Yes, 2
Book Discussion Group 1	Liz Lee. 525 8110 <a href="mailto:leejl@xtra.co.nz">leejl@xtra.co.nz</a>	None
Book Discussion Group 2	Peter Riley. <a href="mailto:peterrobinriley@gmail.com">peterrobinriley@gmail.com</a>	None
Saints and Sinners	Robin Riley. 525 7033 or 027-244 7731 <a href="mailto:peterrobinriley@gmail.com">peterrobinriley@gmail.com</a>	None
TED Talks	Richard English. 525 6179 <a href="mailto:rsenglish@xtra.co.nz">rsenglish@xtra.co.nz</a>	Unlimited
Astronomy	Paul Taylor 021-045 7545 <a href="mailto:ptaylor05@gmail.com">ptaylor05@gmail.com</a>	None
Early NZ History	Christine Pullar <a href="mailto:christine.pullar@actrix.co.nz">christine.pullar@actrix.co.nz</a>	Yes, 2-3
Collecting in Western Culture	Diane Dacre. <a href="mailto:dianedacre@yahoo.co.nz">dianedacre@yahoo.co.nz</a>	Yes
Musicals and Operas	Paul Taylor 021-045 7545 <a href="mailto:ptaylor05@gmail.com">ptaylor05@gmail.com</a>	None
What Does the Science Say?	Jocelyn Tracey 424 9125 <a href="mailto:jocelyn.tracey@outlook.com">jocelyn.tracey@outlook.com</a> and Paul Taylor 021 045 7545 <a href="mailto:ptaylor05@gmail.com">ptaylor05@gmail.com</a>	Yes

## How do you join a group?

You turn up for the AGM and write your name down on the list of groups.

## You want to join a Group, but it's FULL?

First, contact the Group convenor (their email addresses and phone numbers are provided on the WEBSITE, see earlier, or under each group's report). The chances are, there really is a vacancy on a particular date because someone can't be there. In the longer term, the odd person resigns from a Group for a variety of reasons and you will be the first on the waiting list to replace them.

Second, you can form your own Group. Daunting? Sure, it is. But it is achievable. Many have done it and the U3A committee will help you through the process. Note, for example, that there are two Book Discussion groups That is because the first one was full but there was enough demand for another.

## Reports from the Interest Groups

### Climate Change

Paul Taylor set up an ephemeral group to investigate Bill Gates' book *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*. This book produced many questions and stimulated much discussion. It outlined the scale of the problem and how hard it will be to get to zero emissions. It broke down the world's emissions into the major categories: how we plug in (27%), how we make things (31%), how we grow things (19%), how we get around (16%), how we keep cool and stay warm (7%).

Gates says we need many breakthroughs in technology, especially in zero carbon electricity generation. Wealthy nations have an obligation to do more than developing nations. We need to pressure our governments to invest heavily in R&D, and make policies which promote zero carbon options.

The book was written from the point of view of a wealthy American, so to make it more relevant to us, we looked at the NZ Climate Change Commission Report. Different members of our group summarised sections of the report: Agriculture, Buildings, Industry and Heat, Forestry, Electricity, Waste and F-Gases. By the end of the study, our outlook for the future ranged from pessimism to optimism.

### Astronomy Group

Also convened by Paul, the Astronomy Group has turned into a great success, with 16 members. It has covered the following topics so far this year through presentations made by members: the Voyager programme, astronomy & art, Mars, the big bang, and a star party with Prof. Euan Mason. It has also acquired its own large (6" mirror) telescope, on permanent loan from Euan Mason. The group looks forward to learning more later this year about near-earth objects (remember the mysterious and first known inter-stellar object, named "Oumuamua", that flew by us recently?), pulsars, Pluto, and the new James Webb telescope.

### Art History 1

An example follows of the material discussed in the group that looks at early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture:

Dame Zaha Mohammad Hadid DBE RA (31 October 1950 - 31 March 2016) was a British Iraqi architect, artist and designer, recognised as a major figure in architecture of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, Hadid studied mathematics as an undergraduate and then enrolled at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in 1972. In search of an alternative system to traditional architectural drawing, and influenced by Suprematism and the Russian avant-garde.

Hadid was the first woman to receive the Pritzker Architecture Prize, in 2004. She received the UK's most prestigious architectural award, the Stirling Prize, in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, she was made a Dame by Elizabeth II for services to architecture, and in February, 2016, the month preceding her

death, she became the first woman to be individually awarded the Royal Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects.

### **Prehistoric Mysteries**

The Hittites, the Etruscans, the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture. These civilisations were incredibly important in their day, but we were taught nothing about them at school and, indeed, nothing much was known about them until rediscovered by modern archaeology.

A mere 50,000 years ago (long before humans arrived in Australia) there were at least half a dozen types of humans occupying the planet, some of which were sufficiently similar to interbreed. We have all heard of Neanderthals, but the others include Denisovans, the “Hobbits” of Flores, and the tiny people who lived in the Philippines. Again, it’s truly amazing what recent archaeology, including DNA analysis, has uncovered.

The most recently discussed “mystery” was that of Atlantis. Adrian Maloney zeroed in on Santorini as being the most probable origin of this legend, which led us into a fascinating study of the early Minoan culture.

### **What does the Science Say?**

This well-attended group of 27 members have discussed the following topics so far: water divining, is it real? Turmeric, is it effective? Left-handers, are they smarter and more creative? In all cases, the aim was to go beyond the trite beliefs passed down from generation to generation, and to learn from the real science – if indeed it exists at all. Upcoming topics include what the science says about dark matter, offering a universal basic income, the purported benefits of honey, and whether it’s safe to use glyphosate weed killers (e.g., “Roundup”) at home.

### **TED talks**

Up to 30 people have attended the TED sessions in the St John’s rooms. This theme is open to all, because there are no limitations of space. The idea is to show a number of interesting and usually controversial TED talks, and then to discuss them. We started off the year by looking at Fake News, followed by Country Indices; Language, connection and being human; Population, Resources and Environment; How discoveries from the past can affect our lives today; Feel the fear, but do it anyway!