U3A Ellesmere Incorporated
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

April 2025 Newsletter

From the President

The new committee, elected at the AGM last month is Errol Wood (President) and committee members John Prendergast, Nancy Borrie, Neal Borrie, Lyn Minchington, Dorothy Jordan, and Murray Allison. No nominations were received for the position of secretary.

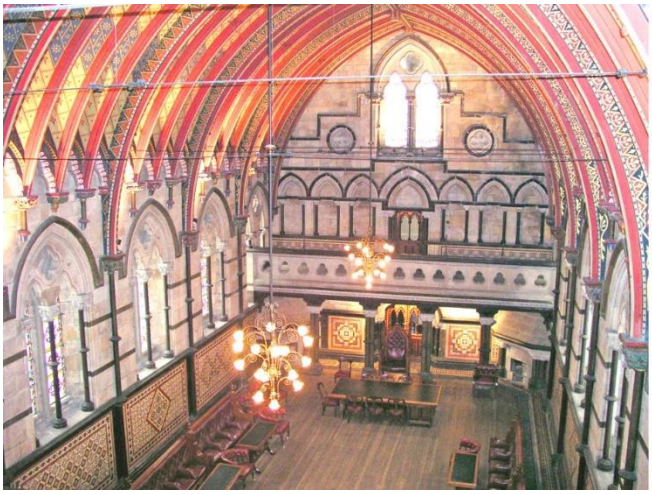
At our first committee meeting on 31st March, we welcomed Murray to the 2025 team.

- Nancy has relinquished her role as secretary, but will work with Murray until he comes up to speed as our new secretary.
- Both Neal and John will be continuing in their roles as treasurer and vice-president respectively. Nancy and John are working to complete the new constitution, Lyn continues as coordinator of the interest groups, and Dorothy is responsible for the name tags.
- We are pleased that Nola Sutherland has volunteered to coordinate the morning teas.

Our March speaker

Dr Ian Lochhead, retired associate professor of Art History at the University of Canterbury spoke. His topic focused on the architectural heritage of Benjamin Mountfort in Canterbury, and his presentation was a very enlightening. Ian reminded us what we have lost through the Canterbury earthquakes, including the Canterbury Provincial Chambers. He has said “the Stone Chamber was, for many, the single biggest heritage loss of the February earthquake.” Given the time that has elapsed since 2011, and the cost involved, it is very unlikely that it will ever be fully restored.

I am pleased that several years before the earthquakes I visited the Provincial Chambers for the first and only time, spending a pleasant Sunday afternoon exploring and photographing the beautiful interior of this historic building. Here is the Stone Chamber before the earthquakes:



Annual subscriptions – a reminder

Neal advised the committee that as of 1 April there were 25 members who had not renewed their annual subscription. This is now overdue, and prompt payment would be appreciated by the end of April please. The details for paying on-line are in the March newsletter.

Upcoming speakers

Wednesday 23rd April

Des Lines, a retired airline pilot will talk about his life in aviation.

Des made his first solo flight at age 16, progressed through the NAC and Air New Zealand ranks over the next 40 years, and eventually became a B747-400 captain for five years, before his retirement. He has a small collection of vintage planes, and is now involved in mentoring young pilots as they embark on careers in aviation. No doubt Des will have some interesting stories to tell.

Wednesday 28th May

Alex Tan is Professor of Politics and International Relations at University of Canterbury. He will speak on Donald Trump 2.0.

Professor Tan is also Honorary Professor (NZDF Command and Staff College), Associate Director (NZ Contemporary China Research Centre), Fellow (John G. Tower Center for Political Studies, USA), adjunct University Chair Professor of Political Science (National Chengchi University, Taiwan).). He writes extensively in the areas of parties & elections, political economy, Taiwan and Asian politics, and international relations of the Asia-Pacific.

Wednesday 25th June

Sarah Anderson, Coordinator of the Te Ahu Pātiki Charitable Trust will speak about conservation in action on Te Pataka o Rakaihautū / Banks Peninsula.

Te Ahu Pātiki Charitable Trust is the guardian of Te Ahu Pātiki, 500 hectares of whenua on Te Pataka o Rakaihautū Banks Peninsula. Te Ahu Pātiki is a newly created public conservation estate in the heart of Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour. It includes the summits of Mt Herbert Te Ahu Patiki and Mt Bradley, the two highest peaks in the wider Ōtautahi Christchurch area. The whenua is protected by a QE11 Covenant and its track network is gazetted with Herenga ā Nuku as part of the Te Ara Pātaka track network.

The Last Word(s)

I'm finished with discussing the merits (or otherwise) of drinking tea and coffee. This month it's alcohol and emigrating to Mars.

One for the road

There is a common view, especially from the liquor industry, that drinking modest amounts of alcohol is good for you. However, a recent review of 107 international studies, reported in New Scientist, has revealed that consuming even modest amounts of alcohol reduces your life expectancy. This conclusion is because of these 107 studies just six of them were not biased.

The main problem was that in their surveys the researchers didn't compare people who have never drunk alcohol with those who have imbibed at some time. Instead, they compared people who no longer drink with those who do. People who give up drinking, especially later in life, often do so because

they have health problems. Also, some studies merged the results from “never drinkers” with those from occasional drinkers. Hence, moderate drinkers appear healthier in comparison.

The six high-quality studies that adequately handled these sources of bias did not show any reduction in risk arising from moderate drinking. Indeed, they showed that the more you drink the higher your risk of heart disease. The graph of health risk versus frequency of drinking alcohol is a consistently upward-sloping line, not a J-curve.

However, while it is healthier to socialise without the need for alcohol, there are benefits of spending time with friends at the club or bar which probably outweigh the health risks of having the occasional pint. I’ll drink to that!

Want to emigrate to Mars? (Adapted from New Scientist 16th November 2024)

Recently, there has been talk about establishing communities on other planets as preparation for when our planet becomes unhabitable due to global warming or some other catastrophe. For example, Donald Trump’s ultra-rich mate Elon Musk has the ultra-ambitious goal of establishing a self-sustaining, million-person city on Mars in the next 30 years. But is he aware of the considerable challenges the immigrants would face?

Certainly, setting up a base on Mars has some positives. It is relatively close to Earth, has plentiful water, a day length similar to our own, provides the chemical elements needed to sustain life, and the temperatures range from -153^{o}C to 20^{o}C at certain locations (not so bad by space standards).

However, the negatives greatly out way the positives:

- The Martian atmosphere is mostly carbon dioxide, popular among plants but toxic to humans.
- We are protected from cosmic radiation by the Earth’s magnetic field, but there is no such protective layer on Mars. Constant exposure is likely to increase the risk of cancer, so thick shielding would be necessary on buildings, or perhaps living underground. Outdoor recreation would be greatly limited.
- The Martian soil looks like sand and dust, but has highly toxic chemicals called perchlorates. When ingested the jagged sharp grains can damage the lungs, similar to silicosis. So this risk, coupled with the perchlorate contamination of plants, which can cause thyroid problems, would discourage gardening outdoors.
- A typical journey to Mars would take more than six months, and settlers and visitors would have to stay for at least a year to ensure that the two planets are close enough for the return journey.
- The vast distance between Earth and Mars means communication delays of between 4 and 24 minutes each way. So it would be difficult to maintain an interplanetary telephone conversation.
- The Martian gravity is about 40% of Earth. This may be sufficient to prevent bone, muscle, and vision loss, which can occur when people have lived in a weightless environment for months or longer.
- A self-sustaining human settlement needs to make more humans. This means conception, pregnancy, birth and developing into a human ready to repeat the process. We know almost nothing about whether any of this can be done in space, or even in a low-gravity environment.

It is very unlikely that humanity will be saved by leaving Earth. Solving our problems here on Earth now is much more important than planning to evacuate to another planet. If we fail to deal with terrestrial problems such as global warming and the threat of nuclear war, there will be no second chance. So, any volunteers for Elon’s pipe-dream?