

March 2026 Newsletter

From the President

U3A Ellesmere Constitution

Now that we have received unanimous support for the new constitution, we are now in the home straight to submitting the document to the Companies Office before the April deadline.

The Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will be held on 18th March, after our regular meeting.

It's not too late to nominate yourself or another member to join the committee. A nomination form is attached at the end of this newsletter. The steps are:

1. Print the form and present it to the nominee (another member or you) to write name and sign;
2. Nominator (you or another member) to write name, position, and sign;
3. Take a photo of the completed form;
4. Email the photo to u3aellesmere@gmail.com, with "Nomination Form" in the subject line.

Our February speaker

Andrea Webley, Fundraising and Development Manager at Canterbury Museum, gave a very illuminating presentation on the Museum, its origins, and the many difficulties with the existing buildings and displays. She also described the sequence of steps now being undertaken to address the various issues, challenges and opportunities that they face. When we heard of the complex steps that have had to be taken to minimise future earthquake damage, water ingress, etc. it became clear that the Museum's redevelopment journey is a long, expensive, and necessary one. We look forward to its completion in 2029.

If you missed the talk, a very informative web site on the redevelopment is available, via <https://www.canterburymuseum.com/>

Subscriptions are now due!

Please remember that your 2026 subscription (\$35 for current members, \$40 for new members) is now due and should be paid prior to the AGM on 18th March. Here are the instructions if you are paying by internet banking:

- U3A Ellesmere Westpac Account **03-0767-0001025-000**.
- For "Details on their statement" - please enter your **Family Name** in the "Particulars" box and your **Given Name** in the "Code" Box. Enter **U3A sub26** in the "Reference" box.
(If your name is more than the available characters, enter just those that fit. This will be enough for the Treasurer to identify your payment.)

PLEASE NOTE: If you are unsure whether you have already paid, check with Neal first.

This month's speaker

Wednesday 18th March (NOTE: this is the third Wednesday of the month)

Dr Sam Hampton's topic will be "The Volcanology of Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū / Banks Peninsula".

Sam is the Director of Academic Programmes for Frontiers Abroad Aotearoa, and a Lecturer in the Department of Geological Sciences, University of Canterbury.

His research has been on the volcanic development of Banks Peninsula, an area incorporated into the Geology Programme of Frontiers Abroad as a new field and research site. Sam has a broad geological background, being involved in exploration on the West Coast (NZ), and geological engineering projects. He has also been involved in course development and teaching at the University of Canterbury, including geological hazards.

Forthcoming speakers

April 22nd – Mark Rocket, Founder and CEO, Kea Aerospace – "Building an Aerospace Nation"

May 27th – Joe Bennett, Press columnist – "What Happens to Happen"

June 24th – John Campbell, retired physics lecturer – "Ernest Rutherford – Some facts you probably didn't know" (to be confirmed)

July 22nd – Dick Sainsbury, retired Professor of Geriatrics – "Healthy Aging"

August 26th – Elsamari Botha, University of Canterbury – "Artificial Intelligence"

September 30th – Simon Lewis, President, Canterbury Astronomical Society - "Astronomy"

October 21st – Wallace Woodley – "The Historical Development of the Piano"

November 25th – to be confirmed

The Last Word(s)

"Digital Dementia?"

Digital technology has changed many aspects of our lives hugely – emailing, mobile phones, internet banking, smart TVs, GPS navigation, etc. I remember that in our home in the 1950s the most sophisticated technology was a stereogram with a radio, record-player, and a spool-to-spool tape recorder. Then the transistor radio arrived, the size of a pound of butter. A lot has happened since then.

Artificial Intelligence (or AI) is the latest hi-tech newcomer, creating debates about the future of learning and work. But the emergence of technologies that promise to change the way we live is not a new experience for us. Think about the change from analogue to digital technology (for example, watches) around the 1960s, and the "digital revolution" that has brought us the internet and its countless associated benefits for communication, education, entertainment, and socialisation. We are part of the generation who lived and worked through this revolution, with many of us are now around our 70s or 80s.

So what can we learn from studies about the impact of these new technologies on our ageing brains? Much has been written about this subject. According to the "digital dementia" hypothesis proposed by

a German neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer in 2012, the increased use of digital devices has resulted in an over-reliance on technology. He claimed that new technology has weakened our cognitive ability, ie, the mental processes we use to acquire and retain knowledge, process information, reason, and solve problems. Spitzer cited three areas of concern:

1. An increase in passive screen time which doesn't require significant thought, such as watching TV or scrolling social media.
2. Off-loading cognitive abilities to technology, such as no longer bothering to memorise phone numbers because they are kept in our contacts list.
3. Increased susceptibility to distractions.

Recently-published research has examined the impact of new technology on older people who have experienced significant changes in the way they use technology during their lives. This huge study combined the results of 57 previous studies, involving a total of 410,000 people, to discover whether there was a link between technology use and cognitive decline.

The good news is that they found that greater use of technology was associated with reduced risk of cognitive decline. This benefit was found even when the effects of other things known to contribute to cognitive decline, such as socioeconomic status and other health factors were taken into account.

Interestingly, the effect of technology was found to be similar, or stronger, than other known factors that help us retain our cognitive ability, such as regular physical activity, or maintaining a healthy blood pressure. While the results from study are encouraging, the scientists can't yet say that the use of technology definitely causes better cognitive function. Perhaps the people used in the study were more affluent and/or educated than the average person, and this could influence the results.

In reality, it's simply not possible for us to live in the world today without using some form of hi-tech device. Many tasks, from paying our bills to booking our next holiday, are now almost completely done online. We are told that cognitively-stimulating activities such as reading, learning a new language, or playing a musical instrument can help protect our brains as we age. My daily participation with "The Chase" is to provide some assurance that my memory is still working.

It seems that greater engagement with technology across our lifespan can stimulate our memory and thinking as we adapt to new software updates, on-line banking, or learn to use a new smartphone or app. Despite what the critics say, not all digital technology is bad for us. However, the way we interact and rely on modern technology makes it inevitable that our skills must continue to adapt to change.



Committee responsibilities for 2025/26:

President – Errol Wood, **Vice-President** – John Prendergast, **Secretary** – Murray Allison,

Treasurer – Neal Borrie **Interest Groups Coordinator** - Lyn Minchington

Constitution Revision – Nancy Borrie **Membership Coordinator** – Dorothy Jordan

Morning Tea Team Leader – Nola Sutherland

Our email address is u3aellesmere@gmail.com

U3A Ellesmere Nomination Form for Committee 2026/27

I would like to nominate _____ (print name)

for the U3A Ellesmere committee.

Name and Signature of nominator _____

Please indicate if the position is for General Committee, President, Secretary, or Treasurer.

Signature of nominee _____