

MEETING PLACE

Royal Oak Bowls, 146 Selwyn St, Onehunga

10am on the 2ND Thursday of most months

NEWSLETTER

December 2025

Next meeting
10-12noon
Thursday 12 February 2026

At the start of the first lockdown in 2020 (how long ago that seems now), I received a note in my letter-box from a neighbour I'd never met. I had no idea who she was, where she lived, or anything at all about her. The note read something like this: *These are difficult times. I'd like to set up a small, local support group to help each other out over the next few weeks – if anyone actually does need some sort of assistance, perhaps we could get together and help.* It was signed and had an email address. I was touched, impressed and thought it was a great idea. A few of us did, in fact, form a little support group. In the event, we were all okay through the lockdown but the gesture of reaching out has stayed with me as a thoughtful kindness which I very much appreciated.

I'm reminded of it every Christmas. Christmas is a time for family; for enjoying the company of friends and loved ones, for reunions - a time of celebrating and enjoying ourselves. It's also a time of terrible loneliness for some. We will all have neighbours and acquaintances who will be alone at this time of year. Some will feel acutely aware of their isolation. Some will be used to it, for others it may be a new and disturbing occurrence. For most – I would guess – it won't be a very happy time.

A small gesture of reaching out to anyone you know is alone at this time of year would be cherished and appreciated. Maybe an invitation for a quick coffee, a gift of a small bunch of flowers from the garden, perhaps just saying something like, "I thought I'd pop over, introduce myself and say hello". It takes courage to approach someone in that way you mightn't know too well, but I remember the note in my letter-box five and a half years ago and I still appreciate the effort my neighbour made.

U3A is about reaching about. We do that once a month. Yes, the byline of U3A is about life-long learning but it's also about fellowship and enjoying the company of others. Let's continue to do that in 2026 and maybe encourage that new lonely neighbour you're going to meet to join us.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all.

Ian

EPSOM U3A EXECUTIVE

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Kaye Buchanan- 620 7572

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Guest Speaker Organiser:

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Legal Advisor

Mike Matson - 022-630 7968

Newsletter

Jeanette Grant – 638 8566

Greeters:

Don Buchanan - 620 7572

Ngaire Mune – 624 0226

INTEREST GROUP CONVENERS

Applied Sciences

Peter Parsons - 021 521446

Appreciating Performing Arts

Shirin Caldwell – 630 1662

Architecture

Brian Murray – 021 026 68396

Art Appreciation

Kaye Buchanan – 620 7572

Art History

Emily Flynn – 021 0902 5094

Big History

Emily Flynn – 021 0902 5094

Book Chat

Helen Holdem - 021 260 3510

Comparative Religions

Duncan MacDonald - 021-316 661

John Locke- 021-187 8061

Current Affairs

Shirley McConvile – 622 3542

Fabric & Fibre Crafts

Charmaine Strang – 027-4177 556

Famous & Infamous Group

Shirley McConvile – 622 3542

Foodies

Graham Gunn – 027 445 0929.

Garden Appreciation

Betty Townley - 626 6673

Introduction to Family History

Bryn Smith – 027 280 5235

Latin

Phyllis Downes – 630 5867

Lunch Club

Shirley McConvile – 622 3542.

Music Appreciation

Carleen Edwards – 624 6298

19th & 20th Century History

Helen Holdem – 021 260 3510

NZ History

Kaye Buchanan - 620 7572

Philosophy

Jocelyn Hewin - 634-1552

Recreational Drawing

Grant Coupland – 638 7496

Scrabble

Joslyn Squire – 021 168 0680

Te Reo Maori

Jenny Whatman – 027 353 2487

Travel

Diana Hart- 021 284 4402

Walkers & Talkers Group

Don Buchanan ph:620 7572.

NOVEMBER SPEAKER REPORT	<p>Saving the world one butterfly at a time</p> <p>Jacqui Knight gave an entertaining and informative presentation at our November meeting, on behalf of the Purereha Trust: Moths and Butterflies of NZ Trust. https://www.nzbutterflies.org.nz/</p> <p>The world and NZ populations of moths and butterflies are declining. There are over 20,000 species of butterflies; NZ has very few but we do have over 1,800 species of moth.</p> <p>Jacqui spoke on how to preserve and increase our populations of native moths and butterflies as they are critical to the health of our biodiversity. Much of her presentation described the habitats NZ butterflies and moths need to breed. Jacqui's work with the trust began with her eight-year old's son's interest and the trust was formed 20 years ago. Jacqui is a family trustee and the spokesperson for the trust.</p> <p>Jacqui gave details and habitats of some of the better-known species of NZ butterfly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The four species of copper butterfly which breed in muelenbekia 2. The cabbage white which can be managed by companion planting brassicas and at certain times of year 3. The admiral butterfly (yellow, which is also in Australia); red admiral (this requires stinging nettle to breed) and the Honshu white admiral from Japan which breeds in Japanese honeysuckle. 4. The blue butterfly which feeds on clover. <p>NZ is rich in moths, some of which are still unnamed. Jacqui introduced us to the magpie, forest ringlet and puriri moths and their habitats. She told us about some of the differences between moths and butterflies including that moths need nectar and a place to lay their eggs and the two spin their cocoons differently.</p> <p>Some of the challenges the trust is trying to overcome include the loss of wild spaces, the increasing use of pesticides and the lack of native plants in people's gardens. The trust cultivates wild plants and helps people establish them in their gardens. Five different species of wasps are another introduced pest which are having a devastating effect on our butterfly and moth population. Jacqui would like to see them included in our predator free programme.</p> <p>Visit the website https://www.nzbutterflies.org.nz/ to share, shop, donate, subscribe, and plant.</p>
SUBSCRIPTIONS INFORMATION	<p>The 2026 Epsom U3A subscription is staying at \$50 per person</p> <p>This should be paid into our ASB bank account –</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Payee: U3A EPSOM INCORPORATED 12 – 3067 – 0204618 – 00</p> <p>Please enter subs in the "code" section and your name in the "reference" section in order for us to have a record of your payment.</p>
February SPEAKER Judy Nicholl	<p>Our speaker for October is Judy Nicholl. She was originally intending to speak in October but had to postpone the talk because of Covid.</p> <p>Judy is a businesswoman who is Chief Executive of Counties Power Ltd, a company that supplies electricity to over 49,000 homes, businesses and farms in the South Auckland – North Waikato region. Prior to accepting this position, Judy had full operational responsibility for Auckland Airport, including rescue, fire, engineering, utilities, forecasting and the processing of close to 20 million passengers per year.</p> <p>Judy will talk to us about two main topics – first, her career journey, beginning as a school teacher and progressing through senior management positions in Fonterra, AFFCO, UNITEC and the NZ Police.</p> <p>Judy & her management team</p> 

	<p>Second, she will discuss how and why the energy industry is currently experiencing rapid transformation, advancements in EV and other technologies, accessibility of alternative energy systems and how changing customer preferences are accelerating businesses' commitments to decarbonisation.</p> <p>[If you access https://countiesenergy.co.nz/about-us/ you'll see a lot about her current business role.]</p>										
ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE	<p>An opportunity for a funded 3-year PHD</p> <p>We are searching for 1 or 2 older Auckland men, ideally members of an ethnic community and/or a Mens Shed member, to take up two PhD project opportunities; one at AUT and one at University of Auckland.</p> <p>If you, or a person you know, holds a Masters degree and is interested in gaining a PhD while making significant contributions to seniors in New Zealand, this opportunity could be for you. Respond by early Dec-2025 to be able to start in Feb-2026. j.parsons@auckland.ac.nz or richard.wright@aut.ac.Nz.</p> <p>The scholarship is intended to support members of the community being studied, so we encourage those who are....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A member of a Mens Shed (current or past, in Auckland or anywhere) • An older person, aged 65+ • A member of an Ethnic, Maori or Pasifika community • A member of the disabled or rainbow community 										
u3a Auckland Network Report	<p>The u3a Auckland Network's AGM was held on 7 November The General Meetings for 2026 will be Venue – St Chads Church, 38 St John's Road, Meadowbank Time - 10am for 10.30am start Dates – Friday 6 March 2026 Friday 3 July 2026 Friday 6 Nov 2026</p>										
2026 MEETING DATES Thursdays, 10am	<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>12 February</td> <td>12 March</td> <td>9 April</td> <td>14 May</td> <td>11 June</td> </tr> <tr> <td>9 July</td> <td>13 August</td> <td>10 September</td> <td>8 October</td> <td>12 November AGM</td> </tr> </table> <p>Please always wear your name badge and be seated by 10am</p>	12 February	12 March	9 April	14 May	11 June	9 July	13 August	10 September	8 October	12 November AGM
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INTERESTING ODDMENT

CBC News reported that Statistics Canada revealed that between February and October, Canadian return trips to the US have declined by a staggering 21% via air travel and an enormous 33.5% for automobiles.

ELECTRICITY THROUGH OSMOSIS

Imagine generating power not from sunlight or wind, but from the simple mixing of fresh and salt water. This is the quiet promise of osmotic energy, a renewable energy source generated where river meets ocean. The idea has been around for decades, but only now is it flowing into real-world use.

The principle behind osmotic potential is deceptively simple. When fresh and salt water are separated by a semi-permeable membrane, water molecules naturally move across the barrier to balance the difference. That flow builds up pressure strong enough to spin a turbine. No combustion, no emissions. And unlike wind or solar, there is no dependence on weather or daylight, making it capable of running continuously...

Now, for only the second time since development of those prototypes, a full-scale facility has opened in Fukuoka, Japan. Built by a consortium including the National Institute for Materials Science and local partners, it's the world's second osmotic power facility designed for continuous output following the launch of another plant in Denmark in 2023. While considered modest in scale, it will generate around 880,000 kilowatt-hours per year – enough to power 220 households or offset the energy needs of a desalination plant...

"While energy is released when the salt water is mixed with fresh water, a lot of energy is lost in pumping the two streams into the power plant and from the frictional loss across the membranes," said Professor Sandra Kentish of the University of Melbourne in a recent interview with The Guardian. *"This means that the net energy that can be gained is small."*

Unlike solar or wind, osmotic power can run continuously wherever fresh and saltwater meet; at estuaries, desalination plants, even inland salt lakes. Researchers say the global potential is vast, potentially one day rivaling hydropower if costs continue to come down. The launch of the Fukuoka plant signals renewed interest in exploring this emerging energy source.

CHINA'S GIANT DAM SHIFTED EARTH'S AXIS

NASA scientists have revealed that China's colossal Three Gorges Dam has subtly shifted Earth's axis—and even altered the length of our days. The man-made megastructure is proof that human engineering can have planetary-scale effects. Built over a decade and completed in 2006, the Three Gorges Dam turned the Yangtze River into a 10 trillion-gallon reservoir. Now, nearly 18 years later, scientists say it's affecting the Earth's spin. According to NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, the dam shifted Earth's rotation axis by about two centimeters—or roughly three-quarters of an inch—by redistributing mass on the planet's surface.

By storing an immense volume of water above sea level, the dam added weight to Earth's crust. This shift in mass changed the planet's moment of inertia, subtly altering its rotation. The change may be small, but measurable: Earth's rotation has slowed slightly, making our days just a bit longer. It's a reminder of how even minute geophysical shifts can ripple through the planet's systems. Similar effects have occurred naturally. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, shifted the planet's axis and shortened the day by microseconds. The dam's impact is on par with such seismic events.

The Three Gorges Dam generates an average of 0.54 terawatt-hours of electricity daily—enough to power 5.4 million homes for a month—making it a cornerstone of China's energy strategy. The dam's creation forced 1.2 million people to relocate. It also submerged around 370 miles of ecosystems and landscapes, some of which had existed for centuries. Praised as a marvel of engineering, the dam also raises questions about the environmental and geophysical cost of such megaprojects. The shifting axis is just one of many unforeseen effects.

EVIDENCE THE STORY OF MOSES IS TRUE

Archaeologists in Egypt have uncovered the remains of a massive 3,000-year-old fortress along an ancient route many believe was travelled during the biblical Exodus. The stronghold, recently unearthed in North Sinai, lies directly on the fabled Horus Military Road, the same route the Book of Exodus describes as the shorter path the Israelites avoided when Moses led them out of Egypt.

Experts said the discovery provides tangible evidence that the road, long thought to be a key setting in the Exodus narrative, truly existed and was heavily fortified during the period traditionally associated with the Israelites' escape. The site's age, scale, and location align with the timeline and geography described in Exodus, fuelling debate over how much of the ancient text reflects historical reality.

Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced the find, describing it as one of the largest and most significant fortresses ever discovered along the Horus route, the military and trade artery that once linked Egypt to Canaan. Archaeologists said the fortress, built during Egypt's New Kingdom period between 1550 and 1070 BC, stood as a powerful outpost guarding the empire's eastern frontier at the time Moses is believed to have lived...The discovery was made at the Tell El-Kharouba archaeological site in Sheikh Zuweid, a Bedouin town in Egypt's North Sinai region.

MOSQUITOES ARRIVE IN ICELAND

A concerning development is occurring in Iceland. For the first time in the island's history, mosquitoes have appeared. This development highlights the far-reaching impacts of global warming on previously inhospitable environments. Until now, Iceland was one of the few places on Earth—alongside Antarctica—entirely free of mosquito populations. Scientists warn that this arrival signals a shift in the delicate balance of the country's ecosystems.

According to The Guardian, the insects were identified by Matthías Alfreðsson, an entomologist at the Natural Science Institute of Iceland, after a local citizen scientist collected them. "Three specimens of *Culiseta annulata* were found in Kiðafell, Kjós—two females and one male," Alfreðsson told The Guardian. "They were all collected from wine ropes during wine roping aimed at attracting moths."

HOW 'BLUE BLOOD' BECAME A SYMBOL OF NOBILITY.

According to the Danish history magazine Historie, this idea was tied to their belief that they descended from the Christian Gothic nobility that ruled Spain before the Moorish conquest. These noble families often had lighter skin than the North African Moors, Spanish Jews, and commoners, who spent long hours working under the sun.

The lighter skin of the nobility made their veins appear blue under the surface, giving the impression that their blood itself was blue. The term "blue blood" became a metaphor for noble birth and untainted lineage, signifying the supposed purity of the aristocracy.

From Spain, the expression spread to other European countries, where it was used to highlight the perceived superiority of noble families over the common people. The concept of blue blood gained popularity through Renaissance literature and art, which often used the metaphor to emphasize noble character and the distinctiveness of the aristocracy. Over time, the term "blue blood" has evolved into a widely used phrase to describe royalty and nobility across Europe.

HOW DIRTY WERE ROYAL PALACES IN THE PAST?

For instance –

Henry VIII and his court comprised nearly one thousand individuals, a considerable number of unclean bodies congregating in one palace simultaneously. This was especially noteworthy, given the absence of running water and plumbing systems. Henry VIII primarily resided in Hampton Court Palace in London, yet he frequently travelled between his 60 opulent properties across the nation with his entourage. Termed as "royal tours," these expeditions were hailed for instilling loyalty among his subjects, but their true purpose was to provide respite from the filth they had created and give ample time for the palace staff to clean it up. Henry had an uncommon contemporary liking for cleanliness

During royal events, it was common to encounter significant chaos, including piles of human waste that needed to be removed. As a solution, the king and court would temporarily vacate the premises and transfer to a new palace, allowing for the restoration of the surrounding farmland and livestock that had been depleted due to extravagant feasting.

According to historical sources, it is noted that a foul odour would begin to develop shortly after the court's arrival at a new palace. This unpleasant smell can be attributed to the accumulation of food waste on the floor, animal excrement, inadequate personal hygiene of the inhabitants, and the increasing quantities of human waste stored in underground chambers.

Rooms and hallways would also be filled with soot and stains due to the frequent fires lit for heating the palace. The large number of people in Henry's court made it impossible for the palace staff to clean efficiently until they departed. It is widely believed that the royal palaces were much dirtier than a typical individual's humble cabin during that era. It is said that Henry VIII provided clear instructions to his kitchen staff. He prohibited working naked or in disgustingly dirty clothes, as they had previously done. Additionally, he ordered them to cease the practice of sleeping in the kitchen. You'd think that would all go without saying...

EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELD HOLE GROWS RAPIDLY IN SIZE

The Earth is protected by the cosmic equivalent of cling film called the magnetic field, generated by swirling iron currents in the liquid outer core. The magnetosphere protects us against dangerous galactic and solar rays, yet it has been weakening by about 10% over the last 200 years or so.

Adding to the strangeness is the South Atlantic Anomaly, a roughly 4.3million square mile-sized magnetic weak spot. Discovered in 1958, the region stretches from South America across the southern Atlantic Ocean toward southwestern Africa. But a new paper has revealed that the gap has expanded by about two million square miles since 2014. The study, published in the journal Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors, says the hole has even changed shape...

Over the South Atlantic, the magnetic field only reaches about 120 miles high, far lower than the field's average altitude of about 400 miles. The hole allows particles from a band of intense radiation surrounding the Earth, called the Van Allen belts, to get closer to touching the surface. The anomaly doesn't have a fixed location or shape but the centre is just off the coast of Brazil, where it is unusually weak... The field has also shrunk by about the size of India over Canada, while Siberia's has swollen by an area the size of Greenland.