

# EPSOM U3A Inc.

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Website <https://u3aepson.nz/>.

## MEETING PLACE

Royal Oak Bowls, 146 Selwyn St, Onehunga  
10am on the 2<sup>ND</sup> Thursday of most months

## NEWSLETTER

October 2025

**Next meeting**  
**10-12noon**  
**Thursday 9 October 2025**

Retirement does give us time in the world. Over the last few days

We have had our son and two grandchildren (aged 17 and 14) staying with us. Previously they were Sydney based but they are now in Wellington. This is the first time we have been able to have an extended time with them. It was an absolute delight when they came, going op-shopping and just socialising with their Auckland cousins. It gave us a whole new insight into their world and their lives. It is very different from ours. When talking with them, we can't imagine what kind of work/leisure they will be doing in ten years' time. Except that it will be very different from us, the baby boomers.

We are considered the lucky generation in New Zealand with freely paid government funding throughout our lives including education, health, welfare and lifestyle.

It is frequently said that we have grown up with public assistance from the cradle to the grave. However despite all this we don't all smile as often as the retirement press suggests we do. Retirement needs to be seen as a privilege with obligations as opposed to a right. We grow older as a set of members of the gold club card where we are told retirement is what we hope for. (true/false I simply don't believe it) But I do know many elderly where this happiness model is totally false. Particularly those involved in someone's care as they grow older coping with varying aging illnesses.

Also for many of us caring for partners can be very challenging as we respond to family needs and aging dementia. Retirement for some is not the happiness club and is a hard daily grind especially around finance, health and daily living.

So what is important? A number of things that are necessary as we age are self care and healthy living, the need to have wide interests and learn new things (which is what we do at U3A), to have as many activities as possible to prevent boredom and small mindedness, community involvement, special relationships with family and friends and being action focussed whenever possible.

Most important however is having a positive attitude that develops into a healthy me.

So let us challenge ourselves to be focussed and be thankful for what we have and what we can do. Care in every way for family and community helps our health and wellbeing and always assist your elderly partner( if appropriate) if they are struggling with the aging process.

As President, I challenge you all to do two things beneficial to others wherever possible. As you grow older this quote becomes very significant. "May you care for others as others care for you."

Blessings

Duncan

## EPSOM U3A EXECUTIVE

### President

Duncan MacDonald - 021-316 661  
[president.u3aepson@gmail.com](mailto:president.u3aepson@gmail.com)

### Immediate Past President:

Kaye Buchanan- 620 7572

### Secretary

Jenny Whatman - 027-353 2487  
[secretary.u3aepson@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.u3aepson@gmail.com)

### Minutes Secretary

Jessie Mravichich – 022 019 0896

### Membership Secretary

Thomas Tam - 520 1084  
[membership.u3aepson@gmail.com](mailto:membership.u3aepson@gmail.com)

### Treasurer & Technical Officer

Thomas Tam - 520 1084  
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### Almoner

Charmaine Strang – 027-4177 556

### Interest Group Co-ordinators

Joslyn Squire - 021-168 0680

Bill Hagan – 021 611 247

### Guest Speaker Organiser:

Ian Jost - 027-488 7037

### Legal Advisor

Mike Matson - 022-630 7968

### Newsletter

Jeanette Grant – 638 8566

### Greeters:

Don Buchanan - 620 7572

Ngaire Mune – 624 0226

## INTEREST GROUP CONVENERS

### 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 McConvilie – 622 3542

### Fabric & Fibre Crafts

Charmaine Strang – 027-4177 556

### Famous & Infamous Group

Shirley McConvilie – 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 McConvilie – 622 3542.

### Music Appreciation

Carleen Edwards – 624 6298

### 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### Wellbeing for Seniors

Duncan MacDonald – 021 316 661

## **SEPTEMBER SPEAKER REPORT**

What a treat September's address was for the history buffs amongst us, but also for the many people who afterwards commented that they didn't know history could be so interesting. This was all due to the expertise and enthusiasm of **Ian Jost**, an Epsom U3A member and committee member, who has just completed his Ph.D on the **Battle of Agincourt**, part of the 100 years' war.

Ian's clear and well-articulated voice injected his own humour and shared his deep knowledge in a personable manner that entranced the audience and brought forth many questions at the end. His own fascination with history has its source in how historical events are mythologised and changed over time, and how important it is to go back to original sources to make sense of our past and provide guidance for the future.

So, Ian asked us, why was the battle of Agincourt such a formative event in history?

It all really began 100 years earlier when Henry III and the Normans invaded England and the lords owned land both in England and France, with the English then having to pay homage to a French king. Many English lords refused to do this and had lands in France confiscated, setting up antipathy towards their invaders.

This occurred in a time of intense religious belief and strict social hierarchies. God was believed to be everywhere and controlled everyday life. There was little social mobility and those who prayed were highly valued as they curried God's favour.

Civil war between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs had broken out in France, due to a power vacuum that was taken advantage of, because of France being led by the "mad king", Charles IV and his weak teenage dauphin. In England there was instability after Richard II was overthrown, and Henry IV faced revolt, rebellion and crime, but his son Henry V who was a devout, intelligent, meticulous planner, brought down inflation, and pardoned the rebels. He saw the leadership crisis in France ad decided to take advantage of it to ruthlessly seek the throne for himself. After ordering all English yeomen to learn long-bow archery, he amassed an army of 12,000:10,000 archers paid at 6d a day and 2000 men at arms who received a shilling a day.

Henry's troops set sail, landing at Harfleur in the Seine estuary, hoping to access paris and stop pirates, but sadly many of his men died or were incapacitated due to unhygienic conditions cause the large volumes of horse manure, and by the constant rain and cold. They decided to march north to the safe English town of Callais covering 400km in 17days., crossing many rivers and covering 23.5 km per day., only to find the road to Callais blocked by 30,000 French men. As both sides settled for the night, henry instructed his men to kneel and pray.

The French hoped to capture henry but were commanded by ill-disciplined nobles, who hated each other as much as they hated the English, and who jockeyed with each other for power and position.

The odds were against the English as the two sides lined up for battle in the morning, the French on ploughed land and the English with many archers hiding in the woods. The English loosed massive swarms of arrows on the French who became bogged down in the muddy ploughed fields, their horses causing mayhem as they floundered in the bog with their riders rolling about in the deep mud. Some of the French fled and rode straight into their own advancing troops. Many were trampled and drowned. 6000 French were stabbed and hacked to death by the English men at arms, while as few as 100 English troops died, the survivors kneeling to pray and killing the wounded, or collecting the spoils of war after the battle was over.

The English then moved on to Callais sending messages of their victory ahead. Henry and his country were favoured by God and a great pageant of welcome was prepared for them, thus securing Henry's reign.

France was stunned and shocked and most of the nobility had been wiped out, Spain tilted towards England the Holy See met Henry and signed the Holy Roman Empire Treaty, then Henry with the help of the Burgundians, seized Paris and proclaimed the throne of France for his heirs. His son, Henry VI married the King of France's daughter and was set to inherit the French throne....but that is another story!!

Maybe we can persuade Ian to tell that story next year. Many thanks for a wonderful talk Ian.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS INFORMATION**

The 2026 subscription fee will be ratified at the AGM which will be held on 13 November. Current paid-up members should wait until the completion of the AGM before paying the 2026 subs into our ASB bank account –

Payee: U3A EPSOM INCORPORATED

12 – 3067 – 0204618 – 00

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.

We now have 202 current members – a new record!

**OCTOBER  
SPEAKER  
is Judy Nicholls**

Our speaker for October is Judy Nicholl.

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.

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.

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.

[If you access <https://countiesenergy.co.nz/about-us/> you'll see a lot about her current business role.]

**Judy & her management team**



**INTEREST  
GROUPS**

**U3A Applied Science - Iodine: The Journey from Gunpowder to Goitre.**

Highlights from Dr David Addis's talk – 3 Sept. 2025. Come and join this new group.

Iodine, the element, was discovered in 1811 by chance during the process to purify Saltpetre. This was required to produce gunpowder for Napoleon's armies.

Prior to 1920 cretinism, goitre and hypothyroidism were common especially in the mountainous parts of the World. High altitude areas were affected the most. These were areas that were stripped of Iodine by glaciers.

Iodine is vital for making thyroxine by the thyroid. Without thyroxine, in Switzerland prior to the 1920s, 10% of babies were born with cretinism, and children and adults developed goiters and hypothyroidism making them more susceptible to brain damage. Low levels of thyroxine affect humans at every stage of life.

Four Swiss doctors from 1883 worked to find the cause of cretinism and goitre. In 1922 the lack of trace amounts of Iodine in the diet was proven to be responsible. Humans require only 1 teaspoon of Iodine over a lifetime.

The use of Iodine fortified salt in Switzerland stopped these birth defects. New Zealand and America were quick to adopt this preventative treatment, but the rest of the World was slow to follow. New Zealand has also now added Iodine to commercially made bread, and pregnant mothers are advised to take supplementary Iodine in pill form.

Peter Parsons and Bill Hagan

**Epsom U3A Fabric and Fibre Craft Sale**

A big thank you to everyone that purchased our crafts or donated money to our charity 'Women's Refuge' at the September Meeting!

You helped us raise \$1400!

Women's Refuge are extremely grateful for this wonderful amount!

We couldn't have done it without you! Thank you again!

**2025  
MEETING DATES  
Thursdays, 10am**

9 October 13 November AGM

**NB Always wear your name badge** and be seated ready at 10am

## BED CUPBOARDS

In medieval Europe, living conditions were harsh. Houses were typically small, often no larger than a single room, with minimal insulation against the brutal cold. The only source of heat in many homes was a fireplace, which wasn't enough to keep the entire space warm, especially during long winters. This is where wooden bed cupboards became essential. By providing a confined, enclosed space for sleeping, these cupboards trapped body heat, creating a warmer, more comfortable environment in an otherwise chilly room.

In many medieval homes, particularly in rural areas, families often lived together in tight quarters. Privacy was a luxury that few could afford, and as a result, the need for space-efficient furniture was paramount. Bed cupboards, often known as box beds, were compact enough to fit into these cramped living spaces while still serving as a functional sleeping area. These bed cupboards weren't just for sleeping. Many had multifunctional designs, allowing them to be used for storage or even as extra seating during the day. In an era when space was limited, especially in overcrowded homes, the ability to fold away the bed and reclaim valuable living space was a huge advantage.

Moreover, for families living in cramped conditions, these cupboards also offered a small amount of privacy — a rare commodity at the time. Even if the cupboard wasn't fully enclosed, many had curtains or doors that could be shut, offering a sense of personal space in otherwise crowded homes. In an era where theft was common, some bed cupboards could even be locked, providing a small degree of security for personal belongings.

## TOO HUGE TO BE TRUE?

Imagine a snake so large it could span the length of a city bus. This isn't a creature from a horror film, but a real animal that once dominated the Earth. The Titanoboa, a massive serpent that lived around 58 to 60 million years ago, was the largest snake to ever exist. Stretching up to 45 feet (13.72 m) and weighing around 2,500 pounds (1.13 ton), Titanoboa was a truly awe-inspiring apex predator. While its existence might sound like something out of a science fiction novel, the fossil evidence makes it clear: this was an animal that roamed the tropical rainforests of what is now Colombia, in the aftermath of the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs.

The first clues about Titanoboa's existence came in 2009, when scientists uncovered fossils deep within a coal mine in Colombia, found in the same region where the asteroid's aftermath created an entirely new world. According to the study published in the journal *Nature*, these fossils revealed a species so enormous that it seemed to defy the scale of life as we know it.

Titanoboa's sheer size sets it apart from anything we know today. Measuring an average of 45 feet in length, it was roughly one-third larger than the green anaconda, which holds the title of the largest living snake today. But what really sets Titanoboa apart is not just its length, but its weight—estimated at a staggering 2,500 pounds. This snake would have weighed more than a small car.

What's remarkable about Titanoboa's size is that it wasn't just a freak of nature. The snake's immense proportions fit perfectly with the environmental conditions of its time. Titanoboa lived during the Paleocene Epoch, a time when the climate was dramatically warmer than today. This warm environment allowed giant species to thrive in the thick humidity of the newly formed tropical ecosystems. The hot, humid climate and abundant resources of the tropical rainforests would have supported the growth of such massive animals, in much the same way that large species like today's anacondas thrive in similar environments.

## POTATO/TOMATO?

Tracing the potato's deep ancestry, researchers have revealed a surprising origin story: modern potatoes emerged from natural interbreeding between tomato relatives and a wild-potato-like species about nine million years ago. Genetic analysis shows that potato plants are more closely related to tomatoes. The study, published in the journal 'Cell', suggests that this ancient hybridization triggered an innovative trait, which, along with recombined genetic variations, sparked species diversification and enabled potatoes to spread across diverse environments in the Andes. The innovative trait in focus is the formation of underground tubers. Tubers are enlarged underground structures, found in plants like potatoes and yams, which store nutrients such as water and carbohydrates.

Today, the humble spud is the world's third most important staple crop, providing critical calorie intake for billions of people. However, scientists have long been perplexed by the origin of potatoes. Potato plants are nearly identical to three Chilean potato-like species called *etuberosum*, yet only potatoes bear tubers. So, the big question was how did a species so morphologically and genetically similar to tuberless plants end up with tubers?

## ANIMAL V PLANT FATS

It is well established that obesity significantly increases your risk of many types of cancer, but a decade-long study has uncovered that there are specific dietary fat drivers that promote tumour growth – and others that don't. In this landmark study, scientists found that animal fats – butter, lard and beef tallow – impair the immune system's response to tumours, while plant-based fats like palm, coconut and olive oils do not.

*"Our study reveals that the source of dietary fat, not adiposity itself, is the primary factor that influences tumor growth in obese mice,"* said lead researcher Lydia Lynch. *"We found that high-fat diets derived from lard, beef tallow or butter compromise anti-tumor immunity and accelerate tumour growth in several tumour models of obese mice. Diets based on coconut oil, palm oil or olive oil, meanwhile, do not have this effect in equally obese mice. Our findings have implications for cancer prevention and care for people struggling with obesity."*

In CTLs, the molecules caused deep metabolic dysfunction in mitochondria, crippling their anti-tumour function. This also hampered their production of a factor (IFN- $\gamma$ ) that ultimately disabled their cancer-killing arsenal.

The researchers also tested human NK cells from individuals with obesity and found similar mitochondrial and immune dysfunction, which suggests there is a direct fat-related driver that affects the immune system's ability to fight cancer growth.

## POTATOES – YES OR NO?

Researchers from Harvard University analyzed data from 205,107 healthy adult men and women – free from diabetes, cancer or cardiovascular disease and across these studies, dietary intake and health outcomes were tracked for up to 36 years, with data collected between 1984 and 2021, and questionnaires and new information entered every two-to-four years. Over the course of this period, 22,299 cases of type 2 diabetes (T2D) were documented.

What they found was that while higher overall potato intake was associated with a modestly increased risk of developing T2D, this risk was almost entirely driven by French fries.

People who ate fries five or more times a week had a 27% higher risk of developing T2D, compared to those who rarely indulged. And for every additional three servings a week, the risk jumped 20%. The results, however, showed there was a cap on the risk increase – the highest intake group remained set at the 27% risk level. In contrast, people who ate baked, boiled or mashed potatoes had no significant risk in developing T2D, when researchers adjusted the data to consider other lifestyle and dietary factors.

*"We're shifting the conversation from, 'Are potatoes good or bad?' to a more nuanced – and useful – question,"* said researcher Seyed Mohammad Mousavi. *"How are they prepared, and what might we eat instead?"*

While it may seem obvious – fries are often deep-fried in oils with added salt – the researchers noted that potatoes aren't inherently bad for health. Fries come loaded, so to speak, with a bunch of added health risks, such as trans fats from frying and acrylamide when prepared at very high temperatures. However, even baked and boiled potatoes – which have a natural high glycemic index – don't deliver the same T2D risk.

## CHINESE LITHIUM METAL BATTERY STORING TWICE THE ENERGY

A groundbreaking study published in Nature has revealed that scientists at Tianjin University in China have developed a lithium metal battery (LMB) with an energy density that is twice as powerful as Tesla's most advanced battery. The new battery can store over 600 watt-hours per kilogram (Wh/kg), a significant leap from Tesla's top-tier battery at 300 Wh/kg. This breakthrough is expected to impact electric vehicles (EVs) and a range of applications, including drones, potentially reducing concerns about range limitations and making EVs lighter and more efficient.

The development of this high-energy-density battery represents a huge advancement in the field of energy storage, which has been a critical barrier to improving the performance and adoption of electric vehicles. Researchers at Tianjin University have harnessed a novel approach to lithium metal battery technology, overcoming limitations inherent in traditional battery designs. The new battery's energy density is not only far superior to Tesla's but also surpasses expectations set by China's "Made in China 2025" initiative for electric vehicle batteries, which had set a target of 400 Wh/kg.

## FLUSHING TOILETS ARE NOT NEW

It is a popular misconception that John Harington invented the flushing toilet for his godmother Queen Elizabeth I. However there is archaeological evidence for a flushing toilet at Wingfield Manor which was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century for Sir Ralph Cromwell. Also, court records mention a building in medieval London which boasted a system of lead pipes taking water from a rooftop cistern to flush the contents of a latrine into the street. Local residents brought a court case to prosecute the resulting public nuisance.