

## U3A Wakatipu

### Chairperson's Report 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013

It gives me great pleasure to present the fourth annual general report for U3A Wakatipu, from the chair.

It is hard to believe that we have been running for four years. It seems only yesterday that Mary Stammers-Smith, our initiator, set up the inaugural public meeting in this hall to get the ball rolling for what became an instant success. As Mary said there was a huge thirst for knowledge in the Queenstown region which was not being catered for. We must also acknowledge Simon Stammers-Smith's work in assembling our constitution, which enabled us to obtain funding from The Central Lakes Trust, SBS Bank and Otago Polytech to purchase our own projection and sound equipment. REAP also provided secretarial assistance to help us get off the ground.

After initially using the Events Centre for meetings we have now settled into St Margaret's Hall with its ease of parking and better ambience. It is just the right size for our average attendance of between 70 and 80 people, though we will still use the Events Centre when we have joint sessions with the Neurological Foundation where more seating is required. The Arrowtown Presbyterian Hall will also be used when there are music sessions.

The year got off to a good start with three art lectures. The first by Dr Leslie Van Gelden on "The Minds of our Ancestors: Early Cave Art". The sophistication of art from 20 – 30,000 years ago was amazing. This was followed by Shaun Burdon's presentation on Renaissance Paintings – sacred and profane, explaining the allusions in them that have been mostly lost to our era. The two paintings chosen also illustrated the importance of story, pattern, structural balance and detail in Renaissance art. Dr Peter Stupples tied up the series with his "Introduction to Abstract Art", a subject most of us were not well educated in. It made you think and look again about the use of art in the modern world.

March was Health month, starting with Dr Phil Wood from the Neurological Foundation. His talk on "Maintaining brain health as we age" was a subject close to the bone for all of us. The most important message was to keep doing things and stay as physically fit as possible. Walking was the best exercise, Dr Susan Heylton followed on with "From Pills and Potions to Pharmaceuticals: medicines and pharmacy through history, followed by her research in Nepal. The final medical lecture, given by Dr Sally Keeling, Senior Lecturer in Gerontology at the University of Otago (Christchurch) was on Growing older in New Zealand: current research and policy issues.

April – Earthquakes. Living in the Shaky Isles. This was a subject of great interest and importance to all of us. Dr Simon Cox started this series with "Seismology of the Wakatipu and the possible affects of a major quake". It was mildly reassuring

to know that though we could have a major shake, we are fortunate in having no high rise buildings and that the majority of our commercial ones are modern and more quake resistant, unlike most New Zealand towns and cities, Graham McDougall spoke on Structural Engineering for Earthquakes. Who would have thought structural engineering could be so riveting ( no pun intended) but it was. John Mitchell completed the series with his lecture “ Emergency Management in the Wakatipu, self reliance and the lessons from Christchurch” I trust all have their emergency kit stored in an accessible place?

May was journalism month with Dr Carol Mutch talking about “News Media responses to disasters – from the perspective of the victim”. As Carol comes from Christchurch this related well to the previous earthquake series, and reminded us once again of the importance of keeping our own emergency kit/supplies in an easily accessible place. The recent Seddon-Wellington earthquake is a timely reminder. Jim Tully followed with “The changing face of journalism and journalists’ experiences in Christchurch earthquakes” Dr Chris Judd spoke on “Journalism and Politics” and this was followed on by our own Steve Wilde with “Challenges and issues for local journalists, and experiences in war zone Afghanistan” We are very fortunate to have a journalist of his calibre living here.

June, July, August were our winter recess, with so many escaping to warmer climes.

September, back in business with a series on International and local perspectives. Our first speaker, Professor Robert Patman, an internationally recognized expert on world affairs spoke on “The emergence of a Post Superpower World” a fascinating subject. David Kennedy followed by updating us on “Shaping Our Future” ( a group set up independently from the Council to come up with ideas on where the Lakes District should be heading). Grant Bayldon from “Amnesty International” spoke on “Baking-in Human Rights” with Amnesty International’s role in the creation of constitutions overseas. It made us realize how fortunate we are to live in a country where we take Human Rights for granted.

Brazil was our next subject. With Brazilians forming such an important part of our local community it was great to hear two local Brazilians, Edna Petrecoli and Andre Macraes talk about their personal experiences. The star turn was Fr. Michael Mahoney speaking about his experiences working for thirty years in an extremely poor Brazilian peasant community. It showed what could be done to improve conditions with a minimal amount of money, huge determination and innovative thinking. He also showed how many developed countries wasted huge amounts of money on irrelevant programmes which often failed to help these poor communities. Pity there weren’t more Fr Mahoneys around. Professor Tony Binns spoke on “Africa Rising” He said the country was making genuine progress – from what is a very low base and though there were many continuing issues, mainly around corrupt dictatorships, this was slowly changing.

Also what impressed was the realization of the vast size of Africa – it could swallow all the USA, Australia, Europe and more.

The General Manager for Finance for SBS Bank, Tim Loan spoke on “International and New Zealand banking regulation in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis” a local bank’s perspective. Tim gave a good background on why New Zealand had escaped the worst of the GFC, and even though we had many finance company failures, all the banks operating here were sound.

October and November were our English Language series starting off with Marion Borrell’s brother Dr Peter Low. His subject “English as a mongrel Language” was fascinating and helped us understand the origins of modern English and how the subtleties and shades of meaning have come about. He also showed how the basic Anglo-Saxon and French/Latin words blended to form modern English.

Dr John Hale spoke about his experiences writing a weekly column in the ODT and the responses from readers.

Dr Margaret Maclagan our final speaker in the series spoke on New Zealand English, a wonderful ending to the programme. Dr Maclagan’s sound archive material, recorded in the 1940s and 50s clearly illustrated the gradual accent and word shifts taking place in New Zealand. This unique archive records New Zealand voices of settlers born as far back as the 1860s and into first generation New Zealanders. Changes even in our lifetime are significant and will continue.

Apart from the main lecture series we had four very successful Study Groups. Two were music groups, meeting regularly through the year organized by Athol Dickson and Peter Barber, an art group organized by Marion Marquand and Robin Stenning and lastly a literary group organized by Marion Borrell. Marion took us through Lloyd Jones’s novel “Mr Pip” a thoroughly enjoyable experience, followed by some of us seeing the film. We thank all the people who provided venues for these Study Groups.

An interesting feature of our lecture series was the contribution by local residents. This was around 50 percent, almost the same figure for academic and non-academic speakers. What really stood out was that we didn’t have a dud – they were all outstanding communicators, hugely knowledgeable and always gave us something to think about. Their genuine enthusiasm was obvious and catchy.

Now it’s thank you time.

Firstly we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Marion Borrell our Programme Coordinator for maintaining this high standard. The work put into finding such high calibre speakers is enormous. It is a huge task juggling the speaking schedules to fit in with the speakers’ availability. Marion has also been responsible for writing the newsletters and arranging study groups.

Justine Cranfield as treasurer keeping the books and membership data base in order and helping collect the door money.

Alan Townsend our techno wiz and keeper of the U3A website  
Athol Dickson for arranging members to introduce and thank our speakers  
And the rest of the committee, Mary Stammers-Smith, Jon Bitcheno, Janie  
Murdoch, Kirsty Sharpe, and Jeanette Thompson.

All the committee members have been great to work with, and all have joined in to do the necessary things like setting out and putting away chairs, making morning tea, buying stationery and gift vouchers , collecting door money, things that make the sessions run smoothly for all the members. This is apart from their contribution of new ideas for the future.

To Bruce Morris for once again preparing our annual accounts

To Isobel McIntyre for providing us with our distinctive Swiss cow-bell for bringing everyone to order.

And to our great sponsors SBS Bank with their friendly staff who come to help with morning tea whenever they are available. Also for free copy work.

To finish off I would like to repeat Mary Stammers-Smith's last two sentences from last year's report

And yes, we now have a vibrant group of people who are not only following the pursuit of knowledge, but also forming friendships and meeting up outside U3A.  
Long live U3A Wakatipu and thank you for your support

Bob Cranfield