

Review of Professor Peter Edwards 'Cataclysmic Italy' in Exmouth Pavilion 10th March 2022



Last year Professor Edwards delivered two presentations for us via 'Zoom'; 'The Death of Venice' and 'The Greek Temples of Italy' which were full of illustrations, maps and diagrams. This time 'in person' we could clearly see the many images Professor Edwards had selected and annotated so well on the Pavilion's large screen, so that by the end we were more knowledgeable about the geo physics of Italy.

Professor Edwards started by recommending Melvyn Bragg's Radio 4 programme 'In Our Time' on 'Seismology' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00154gh>

which had been broadcast earlier in the morning. That programme covered the study of earthquakes and in the Pavilion we were shown an excellent series of diagrams and maps and the impact of earthquakes for the inhabitants of Italy and the resulting destruction of buildings including churches and clock towers.

The audience responded in shock when we were shown the moment part of the beautiful, vaulted ceiling of St Francis' Basilica in Assisi came down during the 1997 earthquakes. A tragic event for those who had gathered in the church to inspect the damage to the ceiling's 13th century frescoes. Four people were killed, including two government scientists who had been called in to make the survey and two of the basilica's Franciscan friars. A film crew just happened to be in the building to record the ongoing inspection. As Professor Edwards sat in the basilica some years later it was with some trepidation as he noted a large vertical crack on an adjacent wall through one of the many 13th century Giotto frescoes.

As the Richter scale was explained to us we noted some quaking text on the left of the screen; little touches like this brought the presentation to life together with our refuse collectors outside the Pavilion providing us with sound effects.

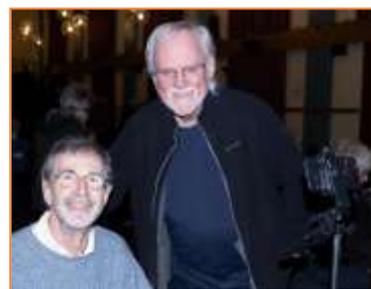
Volcanoes were listed as 'active', 'erupting', 'dormant' and 'extinct'. A map of dots looking like smarties showed us the extent of volcanoes across Italy. Fortunately the 'active volcanoes' are closely monitored. Vesuvius near Naples last erupted in 1944 (and as an aside this had been observed by my father-in-law in the 2nd WW along with many other British troops) Mount Etna in Sicily shows continuous activity as do two other volcanoes Stomboli and Vulcano in the Aeolian islands.

Not so well known is Mount Somma, the remnant of a large volcano out of which grew the peak of Mount Vesuvius. However once we were shown a relief map of the area we could see the significance of the landscape with the resulting destruction but also the rich fertile soils created by volcanic eruptions. So out of tragedy there were some benefits as well.

In answer to a question asking about local interest groups in Geology, Professor Edwards mentioned approaching the Geology Department at Exeter University. However, a valuable source of information is a series of lectures on a YouTube channel from Central Washington University given by Nick Zentner to his first-year students during lockdown. Anyone with an interest in volcanoes and earthquakes would benefit from viewing his easy-going style of informative lectures via <https://www.nickzentner.com/#/geol-101/>

Following the superb questions by our audience I mentioned our own active u3a Geology group with visits to local sites of geological interest. Plus a recommendation to visit Professor Edwards' interesting and informative website <https://italianreflections.wordpress.com/> created during the lockdowns and well worth a visit.

With thanks to Professor Edwards for allowing us to 'live stream' his presentation to our members; 28 of whom had logged on via 'Zoom' and facilitated by John Hunt in the Pavilion and by Ian McLauchlin at home.



Review and photos by Christine Chittock, Chair and Speakers' Coordinator