

Review of Professor Peter Edwards' 'Death of Venice' 11th March 2021

A year ago we all met in Exmouth Pavilion for what was to be our last face to face monthly meeting for 2020. Professor Peter Edwards was booked to appear at the Pavilion in March 2021, but due to covid-19 it was not to be. Fortunately Peter agreed to deliver his presentation via 'Zoom' and we had a record 120 log ins; many couples and thus a large audience.

Peter delivered a most professional presentation full of informative charts, diagrams, maps and photographs. Systematic and dealing with an immense amount of information Peter gave us the salient points and talked us through the problems Venice has faced over the centuries and over recent times.

Eight problems were clearly illustrated and explained. So we could see from the **geography** and geology that there is no real bedrock under Venice. **Human intervention**

has certainly been a factor and we learnt that the development of Venice occurred on mud because people had sought the relative safety of the lagoons, compared to the possibility of attack if they had lived inland. **Building techniques** have of necessity contributed to Venice's problems with millions of tree trunks supporting the buildings and so subsidence is evident in many cases.

Again the impact of human activity such as **water extraction** from the 1930s to 1970s has had significant impact with Venice sinking by 10 cms. Peter's highlighting of **continental drift** was a surprise to some of us but we discovered that movement between the tectonic plates has certainly contributed to Venice's subsidence rate. Whilst on sunny summer holidays it is possible to gain a false impression of Venice, and so it is not always clear that **tides and weather** have their impact with extreme tides and low pressure systems producing heavy rainfall, resulting in flooding.

It was evident that Peter was passionate about the detrimental impact of **climate change** on Venice and related to this was **shipping and tourism**, especially the enormous cruise liners towering over and obscuring Venice's majestic buildings. To accommodate these large vessels, deep navigation channels have to be dredged through the lagoon, affecting the flow of tides leading to erosion. This together with the wash from large vessels has and continues to undermine Venice's wonderful superstructure.

Peter's talk wasn't all about problems and there are solutions as Peter explained. We were left with some hope that things might improve for Venice but we were aware it will be expensive, will need committed politicians and the experience and skills of scientists, engineers and others.

It was certainly refreshing to see how Peter's mathematical and engineering background played a strong part in his delivery especially with his understanding of the combination of factors affecting Venice's future, which he relayed to us so well. By the end of his fascinating presentation we were all better informed and impressed by Peter's ability to simplify a complex subject in such an enjoyable manner. This was evident in the comments in the 'chat' box.

"Excellent talk. Thank you."; "Very very enjoyable talk."; "Superb - really enjoyable and enlightening."; "Very very interesting. Thank you so much."; "Thoroughly enjoyable, thank you." "Really good talk. Thanks v much."; "Excellent presentation, thank you."; "Very interesting talk, I



shall look at Venice in a more enlightened way in the future, Thank you.”; “ Wonderful presentation. Thank you.”; “Thank you amazing informative. Been to Venice 8 times and still plan to return.”; “Fascinating talk, thank you. Remember everyone, responsible tourism!!”; “Thank you a very interesting, informative talk. I enjoyed it.”

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Review by Christine Chittock, Chairperson and Speakers’ Coordinator.