

Dear Members,

Despite the heat, over 80 people came to hear Professor Peter Edwards talk on July 20<sup>th</sup>. As well as his excellent presentation, we also were treated to a rousing rendition of 'Da Doo Ron Ron' by our Ukulele Group. If you would like to know about the group, please see our website for more details. You don't have to be an expert ukulele player to join. Our next month's talk looks equally interesting. Richard Adams will give a talk entitled 'A Life Surrounded by Dragons'. Richard was the Assistant Town Clerk for the City of London and, as part of his role, had oversight of the preservation of old buildings and the development of new ones. In this talk he will tell us about the symbolic dragons that appear on many buildings within the city. We are staging a publicity event in the Town Square on the 20<sup>th</sup> August at the Farmers' Market from 10-12am. Why not visit us for a chat?

Liz Ouldrige (Chair)

### Important dates:

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> August:** Monthly coffee morning at 'The Hayloft' Mole Avon Country Store from 10:30am,

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August:** Monthly open meeting at the Boniface Centre; Richard Adams talks about 'A Life Surrounded by Dragons'. **Refreshments from 9:30am, announcements start at 10:00am.** The talk starts at 10:15.

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August** Publicity event at Crediton's farmers' market. 10 – 12 am

### News from the Groups

We hope to start several new special-interest groups over the next few months. These include Boules, Wine Appreciation, Whist, and a Vegan-friendly group. This last is not just for vegans but for people who would like to try some vegan recipes. You can sign up for these groups, or existing groups, at our open meetings, our coffee mornings or you can contact the Groups Coordinator by visiting our website.

### July's Talk: 'Cataclysmic Italy' by Professor Peter Edwards

Italy suffers from both volcanoes and earthquakes. It's a consequence of earth's solid surface (crust) being divided up into sections called tectonic plates. These are 'floating' on a semi-molten layer of rock called the mantle. The mantle is constantly moving, dragging the plates on top with it. At the Mid-Atlantic ridge, plates are moving apart, new rock is coming to the surface, pushing the Americas away from Europe and Africa. In other places, plates are colliding. Sometimes the plates pile up to form mountains, e.g. the Himalayas. In other places, one plate slides under another. This is called a subduction zone. The plates do not slide smoothly, and it's this juddering we feel as earthquakes. As the surface material of rock and water gets pulled under, the rock starts to melt and, when mixed with very hot steam, rises to the surface to form volcanoes. The eastern side of Italy lies on a subduction zone between the Eurasian and the African plates. In fact, the Po valley is part of the African plate that protrudes up the Adriatic Sea.

As the African plate slides under Italy, we get earthquakes in a line running north-south down the centre of Italy. We saw very dramatic photos of earthquakes in Italy from the last 100 years. Earthquakes are measured on a logarithmic scale, called the Richter scale. An earthquake of 6 is 10x stronger than an earthquake of 5. Earthquakes of 5 will do some damage, but earthquakes of 6 are disastrous. Italy has had at least 11 major earthquakes in the last 100 years and many smaller ones. In 1997 Umbria experienced an earthquake of 6.4. We saw a video that was taken by chance by scientists filming inside the church of St Assisi. The ceiling of the church fell in and sadly some people were killed. Severe damage was done to the structure of the church including the ancient and irreplaceable frescoes.

Down the west side of Italy there is a chain of 30 volcanoes: some live, some dormant and some extinct. There are 3 live volcanoes: Etna, Stromboli and Vesuvius. Vesuvius erupted as recently as 1944, and both Stromboli and Etna are also very active. There are other active areas, for example Solfatara di Pozzuoli, the only privately-owned dormant volcano. This is a shallow crater near Naples which emits clouds of sulphurous steam.

Professor Edwards asked, 'Should you be put off visiting Italy by this tale of woe?' Probably not. There are many places in the world that experience similar geological activity. However, you might think twice before buying a house there!