

Review of ‘Digging Deeper in Pompeii’ by Gillian Hovell (BA Hons) 8th April 2021

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We were most grateful to Gillian for making last minute arrangements to connect from a very cold church when her Internet connection failed. Well, we were certainly glad she did as she delivered a fascinating, most interesting and very professional presentation.

Gillian graduated in Latin and Ancient History from Exeter University and these studies proved to be helpful when Gillian took up work at the sharp end of the trowel. Now in Harrogate and ex BBC, an author, award winning writer, tutor, presenter and public speaker we were fortunate to be able to listen to and see Gillian’s well-chosen illustrations.

Gillian gave us an useful insight into the life of the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. As an archaeologist Gillian likes to be connected with people and this was evident in her talk. As Gillian described the remains of a loaf of bread with a stamp on it, never to be eaten, we could picture the baker busy with ingredients forming the shape and ensuring it was stamped before being sold.

Gillian’s experience of digging at Oplontis, south of Naples gave us a first-hand account of being part of a team carefully revealing the incredible art work as well as the everyday items. Our members were particularly interested to hear about the huge amount of ash that engulfed Oplontis.

Gillian showed us photos of the remains of a villa with wall paintings depicting architectural elements such as doors, columns and steps. Perspective by the artists who worked on the walls and the evident care with which it was undertaken gave a three dimensional effect still evident today and clearly designed to impress. Beautifully painted glass bowls of fruit showed the skill of the artists and small artefacts such as a gaming counter made from glass and intricate jewellery found amongst bones gave us an insight into the different materials, colours and skills of the time.

From the comments we received following Gillian’s talk it was certainly popular and well received. “Many thanks for Gillian’s presentation which was so informative and entertaining.” “Certainly one of the best speakers we have had.” “An inspiring talk, thank you.” “A new and different view of the tragedy of AD 79.”

Thank you Gillian.

Review by Christine Chittock, Chair and Speakers’ Coordinator