

“POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM”

A talk by Clive Essery and Alan Sandford, 16th January 2014

2014 started with the wettest January on record, but we are grateful that the rain at least partially eased off for our first talk of the New Year. This was an “in-house” event, hosted by HADs committee members Clive Essery and Alan Sandford on the subject of “Pompeii and Herculaneum”.

After agreeing to give the talk, Clive and Alan found that the subject matter was so vast that they would need to be focused and selective: this is where the idea of talking about the differences between the two sites came about. They also decided to play on the fact that Clive’s favourite of the two sites is Herculaneum, whilst Alan has a preference for Pompeii.

Clive started on the theme of “contrasts”, showing the difference between the sizes, locations and populations of the two towns, and the different way they were overcome by the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. He also looked at the areas excavated and the depth they were buried, comparing the event to other volcanic eruptions in the past.

Alan then spoke about the “darkness” that overcame both sites. This was a rather grisly look at the human remains found and the scientific analysis of how they met their fate. Most of the victims found at Herculaneum were discovered in the boat houses on the shore, where they had probably gone hoping for rescue from the sea. In contrast the victims from Pompeii were found all over the town, many in their own homes.



On a much brighter note, Clive then spoke about the “brilliance” that is Herculaneum. Due to it being far less visited than Pompeii and that the buildings you see are generally more intact, you can still get the feeling of walking down ancient streets. A visit to Herculaneum offers a unique atmosphere and is something you are unlikely to ever forget.



Alan then spoke about the “full picture” you get from visiting Pompeii, where you can see far more of the buildings (such as the basilica, forum, theatres and amphitheatre) that make up a Roman town than you can at Herculaneum. As it was impossible to show everything, he concentrated on themes such as housing, business, religion and entertainment.

What both Alan and Clive are in full agreement on is you should visit *both* sites if at all possible. You need a whole day to see Pompeii, at least three hours at Herculaneum and half a day at the Archaeological Museum in Naples, where many of the treasures from both sites are displayed. The exhibition in London last year was terrific, but it couldn't compete with the “real thing”.