

THE TOWN OF POMPEII

One of the best places to learn about the Romans is the town of Pompeii in southern Italy. In AD79, Pompeii was buried under layers of ash from a violent volcanic eruption, but the ash that destroyed the town also preserved it for archaeologists. Buildings, furniture, tools and possessions survived almost intact, clearly showing what life was like on the day disaster struck.

A LIVELY TOWN

Pompeii was a thriving town close to the Bay of Naples. Its wealth came mainly from exporting wine, olive oil and wool, and several of its more important citizens were rich enough to own luxurious villas. The town's bustling streets were lined with busy workshops, inns and shops, and the townspeople liked to relax by visiting the public baths, watching plays at the theatre, or cheering on the gladiators in the town's arena.

ERUPTION!

One clear summer's morning in AD79, a massive explosion rocked the streets of Pompeii, as the nearby volcano Mount Vesuvius erupted into life. Soon, the town was engulfed in dust, lumps of burning rock fell from the sky, buildings shook, and the streets were filled with terrified people running in all directions.

The destruction continued throughout the night and into the next day. The writer Pliny recorded that the sky grew blacker than the darkest night. Many people were suffocated by hot, dusty winds, and Pompeii was gradually buried under a blanket of ash.

Here you can see how Pompeii would have looked at the time that Mount Vesuvius erupted.

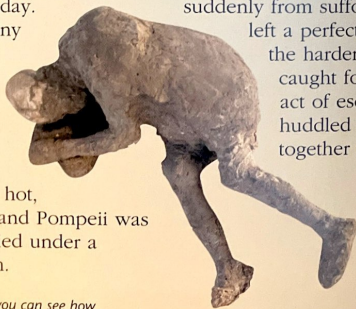


Many lively mosaics and paintings have been uncovered at Pompeii. This sign warned people to beware of the fierce dog.

REMARKABLE REMAINS

The ash gradually became rock-hard and the town remained buried until the 18th century, when archaeologists began to uncover its buildings. They were amazed at what they found. Statues, furniture and lamps had survived, as well as smaller objects such as dishes and rings. People who had died suddenly from suffocation had left a perfect imprint in the hardened ash - caught forever in the act of escaping, or huddled close together for comfort.

This plaster cast of a man was made by filling the hollow shape left by his body.



INTERNET LINK

For links to websites where you can browse an exhibit on Pompeii and see photo galleries of everyday life, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

