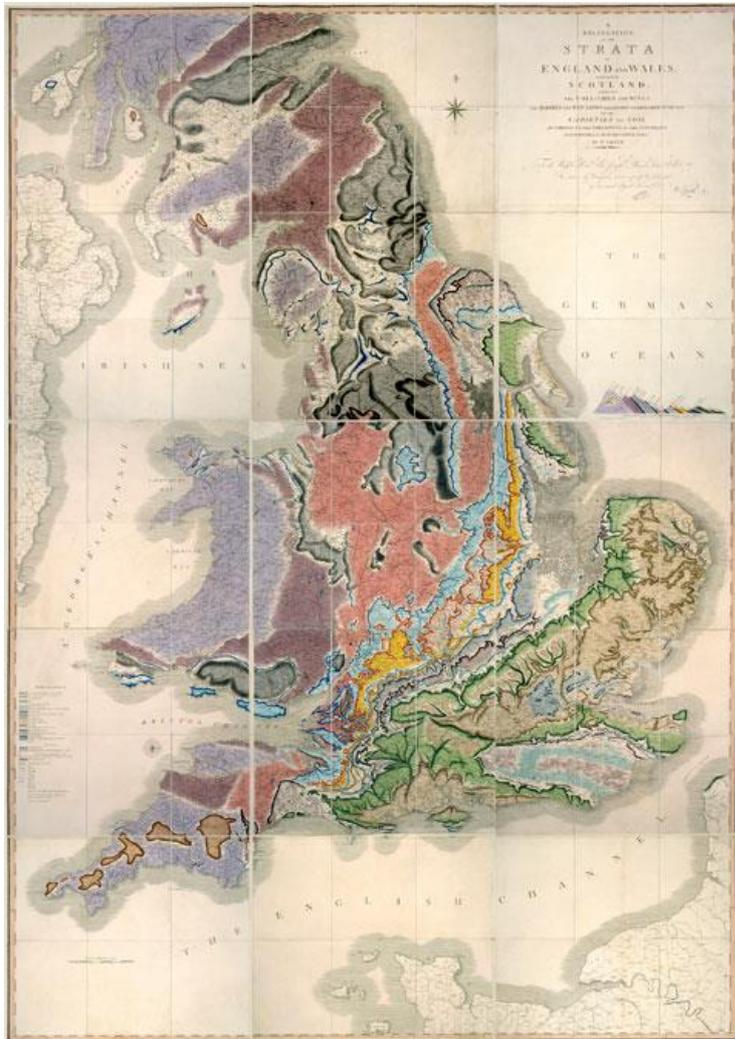


ONE might be hard pushed to formulate a link between the Eurovision Song Contest, a pair of wellington boots, a volcanic eruption and a ground-breaking geological map, but Kyrle Probus member Robin Nicol made it all sound quite reasonable and plausible in his absorbing talk to members entitled 'So what else happened in 1815?'



Robin's audience must have wondered what they were in for, when he started playing a recording of Abba singing Waterloo, and then produced a wellington boot which he placed on the desk in front of him. The link was the Eurovision Song Contest, which the Swedish group Abba won in 1974 with 'Waterloo.'

The Battle of Waterloo took place in June 1815, but the lyrics of the Abba song were not quite right, Robin said. Napoleon did not surrender at Waterloo. He left the battlefield for Rochefort, intending to sail to America. He was intercepted by the Royal Navy and formally surrendered to the captain of HMS Bellerophon, nicknamed 'Billy Ruffian', another link Robin was able to make as Billy Ruffian was the subject of a previous talk Robin gave to Probus.

Mount Tambora in Indonesia erupted in 1815, the largest volcanic eruption of the 19th century. But one of the most significant events, one that did not receive the attention it should have, was the 'Map that Changed the World' and this formed the main topic of Robin's talk. This was the first geological map covering the whole of Britain and was the work of William Smith, born in Churchill, Oxfordshire, in 1769, the first son of the local blacksmith.

Two things affected the industrial revolution, said Robin, the development of the pump and the development of canals. Smith was appointed to survey a canal in Somerset, working with a local surveyor Edward Webb and later for the Somerset Coal Canal company. While working in the mines, he saw that the rock layers in each mine were always in the same relative positions and the seams of coal were always in the same relative position.

He could thus accurately predict where the coal seams would be in relation to the different strata. Also each particular stratum could be identified by the fossils it contained. He wanted to determine if the relationship between the strata was the same throughout the country and went on a fact-finding mission

He was unexpectedly sacked in 1799 by the coal canal company, but continued his work on the map, working as a jobbing surveyor. In the same year 1799, he produced the first large-scale geological map of the area around Bath and went on to publish in 1815 the first geological map of England and Wales and parts of Scotland.

This was 'the map that changed the world,' but unfortunately Smith went into debt, became bankrupt and ended up in the debtors prison. He was released from prison in 1819 and was honoured by the Geological Society in 1831, when he was referred to as the 'Father of English Geology.' His map hangs in Burlington House, the home of the Geological Society.

There was one final thought from Robin and it was that fracking, much in the news at present, would have started because of William Smith's map.