Humanist Association of Ireland and Smurfit Institute of Genetics proudly present

DARWIN DAY

12 feb 2015

"The Ice Age and its Discovery"
FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

Darwin, controversies, 200 yrs research and what we now know.

7pm Thurs 12th Feb
Prof. Pete Coxon / Thomas Davis Lecture Theatre / Arts Building
Trinity College / Dublin
Prof. Pete Coxon

Pete Coxon is a Trinity Geographer in the tradition of his friends and colleagues Frank Mitchell and Bill Watts. Pete has a special interest in the Irish landscape and in Quaternary studies in general and his research focuses on the changes in the natural landscape over the last 2.6 million years — the Quaternary Period — that is still colloquially known as ‘The Ice Age’. Pete is particularly interested in the effect of environmental changes throughout the Quaternary on the landscape of Ireland but has worked on Quaternary deposits as far afield as the Himalaya and the USA.

Pete Coxon has been at Trinity since 1979 and has served as the Secretary to both the Irish Quaternary Association (IQUA: http://www.iqua.ie ) and the Quaternary Research Association of the UK (QRA: https://www.qra.org.uk ). He has also been Vice-President of the QRA and President of IQUA and is currently the President of the QRA and will be the UK representative at the next INQUA Congress in Japan. Pete served as the Secretary-General of the International Union for Quaternary Research (INQUA: http://www.inqua.org -a member of ICSU) for two terms between 2003 and 2011 and has also been the Irish national delegate to INQUA on 4 occasions. In 2011 he was awarded IQUA’s Frank Mitchell prize for research and teaching and he is a FTCD (1992) and MRIA.

The Ice Age and its Discovery: Darwin, Controversies, 200 years of research and what we now know...

As the Little Ice Age drew to a close in the early part of the 19th century a number of broad-minded, widely read and brilliant natural historians across Europe began to realise that glaciers had once been far larger in the past and that many of the surficial deposits (many of which were full of mammalian fossils) previously thought to have been formed by a diluvial flood were the results not of catastrophic flooding but of extensive changes in environment over long periods of time. The lecture will look at the early protagonists for a far colder (and climatically variable) world in the not too-distant past, some of the mistakes made during the early work and the development of the classic theory of “Die Eiszeit”. The scientists involved quickly moved on in the characteristic staccato fashion of new ideas punctuated by occasional incredible breakthroughs —though it took some geologists decades to accept that the action of ice could be an important landscape forming process and this reluctance to accept a paradigm shift can be seen in the context of entrenched perceived wisdom.

I will look at the realisation that there had been not just one but many advances of ice across NW Europe and North America and the search for a possible cause of repeated glaciation. Once a potential driver of such immense change was identified how could it be proved and how long did this take?

The talk will look into our contemporary understanding of climate change, the importance of Quaternary science in properly understanding such change, the work of glaciers and just what a huge step those first Quaternary scientists made.

All are welcome to attend this free public lecture