

# **JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST REPORT ON CONFERENCE**

**Hazel McLellan  
PhD Student, Institute of Molecular Plant Science**

**Conference Title:** The XIII International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions

**Travel Dates:** 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> of July 2007

**Location:** Hilton Sorrento Palace Congress Centre, Sorrento, Italy

**Aims:** Experiencing an international conference, finding out what's new in the field and presenting my work

## **OUTCOME:**

The XIII International congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions was held this year in the stunning location of Sorrento on the Amalfi coast, the playground of the Italian glitterati. The MPMI conference is held biennially and I was very grateful to secure funding from the James Rennie Bequest in order to attend. As a third year PhD student this was the ideal time for me to attend a conference of this magnitude, with results to present and prospective employers to meet and greet. This conference was approached with some caution; however, as the last conference in Cancun, Mexico was postponed by a hurricane and the rescheduled meeting had to be hastily moved a hundred miles inland due to another freak storm. On arrival at Naples airport quite a few eyes were drawn apprehensively to the huge bulk of Mt Vesuvius which dominates the skyline and has been known to erupt with devastating consequences.



The view approaching Sorrento



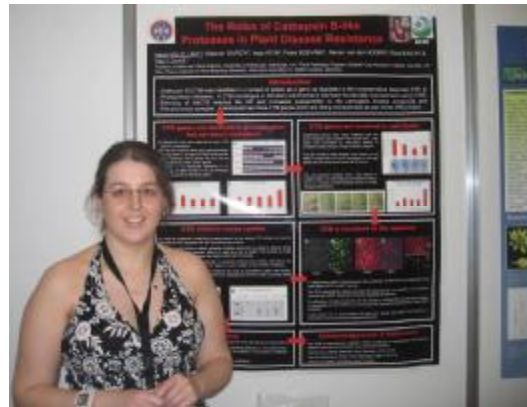
Piazza Tasso, the main square

Having arrived safely in Sorrento town we made our way to the Hilton, a short but hot walk from our apartment, in temperatures in excess of 30°C, to find a fully equipped purpose built conference centre. Matteo Lorito and the local committee did a great job organizing the congress, and organized they had to be to accommodate 1100 delegates, 930 posters and 161 presentations and to squeeze all this into just five days. The days were tightly scheduled with mornings consisting of two plenary sessions whereas in the afternoons there were 2 sessions each with a choice of 3 concurrent sessions, split up with enough coffee breaks to allow us time to refuel and meet our fellow delegates. Lunch itself was a tasty military operation with 1100 hungry mouths to feed in 90 minutes.

Posters were displayed all week, with one changeover, allowing browsers to graze at will filling their minds with points of interest. There were also two evenings dedicated to poster sessions. This was the first opportunity for me to present my work outside my own research group, and the sheer volume of people was a little intimidating. I had expected my work to be lost among the 464 other posters on show at the time but was pleased to have some people take the time to discuss it with me, asking thought-provoking questions and giving me a fresh perspective.



Feeding the masses



Me & my poster

Now for the Science. As this was the “BIG” meeting in this field it had sessions covering all aspects of plant-microbe interactions, all major pathogens and model systems present and accounted for and then some. In fact I sometimes felt information overload, I suspect these big meetings take a bit of practise and a lot of forward planning with the book of abstracts to get the most out of them, in terms of seeing what is most interesting and relevant to you. Nevertheless, I began to spot a pattern: effectors and PAMPs are the new buzzwords, avirulence factors are sooo last season!

One session I particularly enjoyed was on Non Host Resistance with talks from Thorsten Nurnberger on Bak1 and cell death and Volker Lipka and Pawel Bednarek on PEN genes and mutants among others. Petra Epple gave a presentation on *Arabidopsis* metacaspases and cell death which was extremely useful and relevant to my project and I also caught an interesting talk by Richard Oliver which showed the creation of new plant diseases due to the transfer of a toxin encoding gene from one pathogen to another. I saw many other great lectures too numerous to mention here and amongst all this we still managed to find

time to squeeze in a meeting with some collaborators to further our plans for future research.

Heads spinning with all that we had seen and heard each day, we took advantage of the evenings to relax and recuperate, exploring Sorrento and sampling the fabulous Italian cuisine; soaking up the culture and the local liquor lemoncello in roughly equal amounts. We also got an afternoon off to join the congress excursion: a guided tour of the historic ruins of Pompeii nearby which were buried alive when Vesuvius went off thousands of years ago. This was an opportunity not to be missed and we definitely got the juiciest insider information from our local guide who had an interesting take on the social activities of the ancient inhabitants.



Up Pompeii



The Harbour by night

All in all I found this a very useful and stimulating experience which has already encouraged me to attend other smaller conferences and play a more active role in them. I would just like to thank the James Rennie Bequest again for making this trip possible.