

Report for the March 2015 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 13 March Dr Chris Baddiley talked to us about the Universe, giving those with a scientific background a huge treat. For the generalists amongst us, it was still a fascinating insight into planets, constellations, knowledge about stars and galaxies as well as information about eclipses of the sun and moon.

Chris is a retired astro-physicist who spent his early years in Cambridge, London and Boston, Massachusetts, and has also worked at the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh and at RSRE/Qinetiq in Malvern. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and is a Founder Member of the Worcester Astronomical Society. He has taught U3A courses in astronomy. Amongst Chris's specialities are infrared cameras, light pollution limitation, mathematical modelling and innovative thinking. Chris lives near to Malvern and has constructed an impressive observatory where he works.

Although a faulty cable meant that we could not usefully wear red and green glasses to help us see the universe in four dimensions, we nonetheless could still be taken by Chris through his graphic displays of how the constellations and galaxies looked from a distance of different numbers of light years. We saw views of the skies at mid-day throughout the year at 5-day intervals, observing the Sun, Venus and Mars, for example. We saw stars orbiting around each other and comets orbiting and learnt that it is interstellar dust clouds that have created stars in the first place. The most known stars have lives of only a few million years. A journey around the Orion constellation was most interesting. Chris explained that stars come in all sizes and temperatures. 13.7 billion years ago takes us to the origins of the Universe. Through Chris's diagrams we were able to see the constellation of Ursa Major, one which is visible throughout the year in most of the northern hemisphere, viewing it as it looked one hundred thousand years ago and then what it will look like in one hundred thousand years' time. Chris talked in detail about the composition of the sun and said that it had run half of its expected lifecycle at nearly 5 billion years, having burnt up about half of the hydrogen at its core.

In a question and answer session to conclude this talk, we discussed whether the time travel shown in the television science fiction drama "Star Trek" would ever be possible, and concluded, sadly, that it would not!

On Civic Society business, Bob Tilley gave us an update on "Neighbourhood Planning", which has to be a community-led exercise, and recommended attendance at a meeting for this set up by Malvern Town Council on Thursday 9 April 1 – 7 pm at the Abbey Hotel. People are encouraged to attend to find out what it is all about and perhaps volunteer time to join a specialist group. Another piece of good news is that funding for the Route to the Hills Partnership has now been obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund, concluding an application process that started in 2011. This project aims to develop a cohesive heritage "route" around the town using a selection of innovative techniques. A third piece of good news is that a Local List SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) has been approved after a period of 5 years. For more information, please see the March 2015 issue of Malvern Civic Society's newsletter, Bandstand. Finally, we were also encouraged to complete by the end of March the Malvern Civic Society questionnaire, circulated by email and also available in hard copy for those who do not have access to the Internet. The questionnaire is to give the Executive your views on how you would like to see the Civic Society develop. The Executive will then of course report back to you with the findings.