

Astronomy Talk 11th April 2017

How Astronomy Has Changed

Lilian Hobbs came to talk to us about how astronomy has changed in her lifetime. She started with a 3" refractor, but as time has gone on available telescopes have moved up through 10" to 16". Dobsonian mounts from the 1950's have proved very popular as they allow large mirrors and are inexpensive.

Solar observing has moved from mylar filters to dedicated telescopes, e.g. the Coronado HX in 2005. Similarly eyepieces have changed from few and simple to much more sophisticated ones. Other developments like robotics and GPS have also revolutionised the field.

Photography has gone from SLR cameras with 35mm slides to CCD cameras with big chips, and then webcams in 2001. Digital cameras first appeared in 1994.

Computers have also revolutionised the activity, going from desk top to laptop to tablet, and going from connecting to control the telescope to being part of the telescope. Automatic focus exists, and the whole thing can now be managed from indoors. More time is now spent processing than taking pictures, as webcams allow adding photos together and with the use of colour filters excellent pictures can be obtained: there are many different software packages.

The internet is very useful: social media chat, sharing pictures, getting questions answered which YouTube covers very well, remote control of telescopes, etc. It also gives detailed information about e.g. satellites, weather, etc. For astronomical books, Lilian recommended digital books, as the images are much better than in the printed versions.

And no doubt more change to come: today is heaven if you're an astronomical gadget freak!