

Astronomy Talk 21st July 2018

Edwin Hubble: Astronomer of the Galaxies

Allan Chapman came for what seems to have become his annual visit to talk about Edwin Hubble and early 20th Century astronomy.

Hubble (1889-1953) was a central figure in developing the understanding we have today about the universe. He was also an entertainer and spent a lot of time with Hollywood names.

His early life was one of excellence in school and at games, and he read a law degree in deference to his father at the University of Chicago. He enlisted for WWI in 1917 but didn't get to see combat. He was a Rhodes Scholar, and became a quite eccentric anglophile. His real interest was science and astronomy, and he managed to get a position at Mt. Wilson in California, where the 100" Hooker telescope had been constructed.

Allan talked about the pre-watershed (1924) times when people were trying to understand what spectra revealed and whether the Milky Way was all there was in the universe. In 1924, Hubble discovered a Cepheid variable star in the Andromeda Galaxy (M31), which immediately showed that M31 was far beyond the bounds of the Milky Way. He recruited Milton Humason, who turned out to be an excellent photographer using the large telescope.

In 1929 Hubble noted the red shift of more distant galaxies, which we now call Hubble's Law. The idea of the expanding universe as being a consequence of Einstein's theories was explained in 1930 by a Belgian cleric, Georges Lemaître.

Hubble died from a heart condition aged 64, and had he not died so young he would undoubtedly have received the Nobel Prize.