

Astronomy Talk 23rd March 2019

Quirky Astronomy

This talk was given by Geoff Kirby, who's from Weymouth and has been an astronomer for a very long time!

Geoff based his talk on his recent book, "Wacky and Wonderful Misconceptions About Our Universe". He divided it into 3 sections: people, the solar system and then other odds and ends.

Then first section looked at Tycho Brahe, who was probably the subject for Shakespeare's "Hamlet". Then on to George Ellery Hale (he of the 200" telescope), the murdered Dr Elliott (1787), William Herschel and finally the Rev. Francis and his book "The Temperate Sun".

We then moved on to the solar system, moving outwards. Venus was the source of canals per Percival Lowell (probably seeing the blood vessels in his eyes), and of aliens: all of which vanished when probes showed how inhospitable it was.

Then the Earth, with theories about it being hollow and having holes at the poles to access the inside. These included that idea that we're on the inside of the surface, looking upwards towards the centre. And of course the flat Earth theories. The inhabited Moon was covered, some of the stories hoaxes, and some simply wrong.

Mars of course involved Lowell's canals, etc. Then we moved on to snippets about Jupiter, Saturn, and the Voyager probe information discs.

Lastly we looked at how comets were harbingers of doom, e.g. the Heaven's Gate cult's mass suicide about Hale-Bopp. Geoff then covered some recent eccentrics: Mr Bradbury's small but "very powerful with lots of lenses" telescope, and finally a theory about the Earth and the Sun being the only 2 objects in the universe, inside a reflecting shell.

A very entertainingly presented talk, with a large appreciative audience.