



Chairman's Newsletter: DECEMBER 2011

WELCOME

Welcome to the Christmas Newsletter. I am able to report that the membership stands at 320 fully paid up members. Annually we are seeing about a 10% turnover of members, with the 10% leaving mainly due to age or members who have only in the short term. May I pass on our treasurer's appreciation for prompt payment of subscriptions and the generous donations to the Education Fund.

This autumn we have managed to negotiate 12 extra seats in the studio theatre bringing the total to 168 when in the Horseshoe layout. We now don't advertise lectures, held in the studio, outside the society and in conjunction with other admission policies we have managed to avoid previous overcrowding difficulties. We have also been lucky to have had the use of the main theatre for the October and December lectures, January's lecture will be also held there. February, March and April's lectures will be in the Studio set out in the cabaret layout which, unfortunately, will mean about 145 seats available. In addition there will be standing room at the back. Although this is not an ideal situation it is out of our hands.

At the December lecture we handed out a questionnaire concerning member's attendance at the Annual Dinner and the Summer Supper, to ascertain member's preferences regarding social events. We intend to repeat the exercise in January.

MONTHLY LECTURES

Our September lecture was attended by 109 members and 9 visitors totalling 118 and was given by Dr. Jeremy Selman of the Fossatello Group. The lecture concentrated on the history and development of food preservation and packaging, together with recent developments such as modified atmosphere and active packaging.

The October lecture was given by Simon Dingle, Operations Director of Carillion PLC and was attended by 149 members, 1 student and 19 visitors, making a total of 169 in the audience. The lecture was entitled The New Library in Birmingham and covered the building and development of what is reputed to be the busiest library in the country which will house not only books but also a wide range of archives, digital media and the splendid Shakespeare Memorial Room. The library is due to open in 2013 and the project is likely to cost £189 million.

Professor John McGrath gave the December lecture entitled Improving Your Skin covering skin rejuvenation, cosmeceuticals and skin regeneration. He talked of the importance of research into the structural and molecular pathology of ageing skin which can provide new insights into tissue repair and regeneration. It was attended by 122 members, 2 students and 21 visitors making a total of 145.

THE 2011 DARWIN MEMORIAL LECTURE

The 22nd Erasmus Darwin Memorial Lecture was given by Professor Lord Martin Rees, The Astronomer Royal, the event was sold out and the audience included 154 students from local schools. The lecture, Life and the Cosmos, took us back to the beginnings of our cosmic history, nearly 14 billion years ago and forward to the future prospects for space science and exploration. We were introduced to the emergence of stars and planets and learned of how life on our planet has developed into the complex biosphere we know today and that there are other planets out there with such a resemblance to the Earth that we may expect life to exist on some of them!

SCHOOL'S LECTURE

The School's lecture was given on December 6th at the Friary School, by Dr Richard Bryan MB, ChB, PhD, MRCS Chief Investigator, Senior Research Fellow School of Cancer Studies, University of Birmingham. Apart from a revision of cell biology, a discussion of cancer cells and present treatments, Dr Bryan talked about current ideas in new treatments and particularly how genetics and the genome is driving new cancer treatments which are personalised and tailored to the individual. We are extremely grateful to Dr Bryan for the time he gave to the students from the three local secondary schools which were represented at this excellent event.

DISCUSSION LUNCH

We held the 10th in our series of Discussion lunches on Thursday 22nd September in Darwin House. Clive Edmunds, who teaches at The Two Rivers High School at Tamworth, gave us a short presentation on the Green Power Project for which ninety of his students, of all abilities have built and raced an electric car, in endurance races, throughout the year. Before lunch we were able to view one of the cars which the students had built and as the Society had previously granted a donation to the project it was interesting to see how our money had been spent.



ANNUAL DINNER

This was held at Packington Moor Farm on October 5th and attended by 80 members and their guests. This year's dinner saw the inauguration of our new President Professor Sahar Al-Malaika BSc PhD CChem FRSC FIMMM, Head, Chemical Engineering & Applied Chemistry, Leader, Polymer Processing & Performance Research Unit at Aston University. John Campbell, our outgoing President, presented Sahar with her Chain of office before she gave an acceptance speech. Our thanks to John, who over the last two years has been a great supporter of the Society attending as many lectures and events as possible with his wife Shelia and assisting the committee.

VISITS

In October 26 members visited Thorlux Lighting in Redditch. This thriving British company manufactures commercial lighting, exporting to 60 countries. We were shown the latest developments in lighting, light sources and the systems that control them within the display area in which there were also two prison cells where the 'prisoner proof' lighting units can be serviced externally and a mock up of a hospital ward demonstrating various over bed lighting systems. Thorlux won the contract to install all the lighting in the UK's recently opened, second longest road tunnel at Hindhead in Surrey and to demonstrate this there was a display of the different types of lighting used in the tunnel. Lastly we visited two school classrooms demonstrating the sophisticated multiple lamp units which can automatically self adjusting to selectable ambient levels. We also toured the manufacturing, R&D and laboratory facilities.

November saw 24 members visit BAE Systems at Warton, Lancashire, where the Typhoon, the Joint European Fighter, is assembled. We heard an informative presentation, before the factory tour, explaining in what areas BAE Systems are now involved in addition to aircraft production. Whilst visiting the hanger where the £68 million pound Typhoons were being assembled, our attention was drawn to the rectangle of floor just under the plane, which is isolated from the rest of the hangar floor, in order to avoid tidal heave as the site is near the coast. This otherwise could upset achievement of millimetre accuracy in the axial alignment during assembly. Next we saw the facility where the GR4 Tornado aircraft were being up rated. On Saturday 26th November 24 members visited William Haycock, Clockmakers and Clock Restorers, in Ashbourne. This family firm

established in 1826 is currently run by direct descendant Neil Haycock. Ashbourne was a centre for clock making 200 years ago but only the Haycock business survives today. Charles Haycock gave us a conducted tour of the works, among whose previous visitors was Fred Dibnah! Mounted on long bench lines was a multitude of small clock making machinery, much of it over one hundred years old, still driven by overhead line shafting and whirling leather belts. We watched, intrigued by machines cutting wheels, pinions, ratchet wheels and verge escapements. We saw traditional clocks under construction as well as being shown modern water cut brass frames for a large and highly elaborate frame clock on order. Another line for the firm is supplying hand built replica model steam fire engines which were originally built for Victorian children by Bing of Germany. To finish, Mr Haycock showed us illustrations of a full sized wooden replica of a water-frame he had made for a German Museum where he was also feted for his excellent reproduction of Frederick Arkwright's revolutionary cotton carding machine, driven by water power.

Due to the current economic climate visits have become difficult to organise. Many of the successful trips have resulted from a lead contact from either a member or the committee, if anyone has a contact for an interesting visit please let Tim or Mike know.

STUDENTS

Mark Richards has completed his A levels and is now at Coventry University studying for a BEng in Aerospace Technology, which is a four year course with an industry Placement. He has recently won a £2000 scholarship from M6 Toll. Lewis Blackburn of Burntwood has contacted me to inquire whether any members would be able to offer him work experience between the 9th and 13th July 2012. He is interested in physics, astronomy and chemistry and would like as much relevant work experience as possible to assist him in deciding in which direction to take his studies.

IN CLOSING

My thanks go to the committee for all the hard work that they have done to organise all the events and keep the administration running smoothly.

I wish you all a pleasant and peaceful Christmas.

Paul Bettson
Chairman