

Our July meeting marked a full year of meetings after the Covid induced hiatus. It was great to see a good crowd in the warm weather. It could have been worse, though, as we did at least miss the record temperatures of the preceding Monday and Tuesday!

Our speaker was Tim Wetherell of Exmoor Stargazers. Tim was the last speaker before the Covid lockdowns so having him back was an appropriate bookend to the lockdowns.

Tim's topic was "The End of the Universe..". The talk started off with how we have become able to determine the size & age of the universe and what factors determine how the universe will evolve from now on. That is largely determined by the amount of dark matter and dark energy in the universe so it could be a long slow process or a "big rip". One intriguing prospect is that the Higgs Field (that gives mass to particles) may not be at its lowest energy potential. A particle falling to a lower Higgs Field state, by quantum tunnelling, would create an ultra-dense volume which would spread to take over the rest of the universe. This could happen at any time so could shorten the lifetime of the universe. Doctor Who scriptwriters have obviously already been here!

After the break it was agreed that we should try to have an observing session after the Gadgets and Gizmos meeting on September 21st. Nautical Twilight will be over by 20:30 so we could set up during the break outside the hall. Saturn should be near the meridian and Jupiter will be rising. All this is very weather dependent as usual!

We had news of 3 telescopes that are up for sale. They are a 130mm Reflector, a 200mm reflector and an 80mm refractor. Anyone who is interested please contact Terry at terry.evans@hotmail.co.uk.

Terry had some images of the lineup of planets in late June taken from Australia, as well as some noctilucent clouds from the Quantocks. Imaging from our northern latitudes is, at best, not-trivial from late May to the end of July but perhaps we'll have better luck now that it at least gets properly dark, if only for a few minutes every night.

The August meeting's talk will be by Chris Starr who will talk about the planned mission to the asteroid Psyche.