



The new season of meetings got off to a good start on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September, with a visit from Colin Johnston of Armagh Planetarium. There were over 30 people in attendance, on a cold and very wet night. Several members of the audience were first time attendees, and they joined the regulars in enjoying a thoroughly interesting lecture.

Colin's subject for the evening was The Moon. He started off by describing the Moon in relation to other large moons and small planets in the solar system, comparing them by size, chemical composition and surface characteristics. Using a blow-up model Earth, a tennis ball, a piece of string and with the able assistance of young Patrick, he demonstrated the distance between the Earth and Moon, and described how long it would take light to travel between the two.

He then moved on to discuss theories about the formation of the Moon, mentioning several scenarios which have been considered as feasible explanations, before concluding with a description of the current most widely accepted theory, which proposes that the young Earth was struck a glancing blow by another planet, which was destroyed in the process. The debris which was thrown off into space eventually formed the Moon as we now know it. He briefly described how the Moon's orbit means that it always shows the same face to Earth, the phases of the Moon as it goes through its monthly cycle, and pointed out the major part its influence played on how Earth, and life on Earth, developed.

Colin ended by discussing mankind's attempts to observe and map the moon, before talking about both the American and the Russian moon programmes in the 1960's and 1970's. He talked about the plans for lunar bases, which, at the moment, seem to be no closer to fruition than they were 40 years ago, although he did note that the recent apparent discovery of water in some craters near the North Pole of the Moon may encourage these plans to be revived.

A short question and answer session followed, before everyone retired to the kitchen for tea and coffee.

Many Thanks to all who attended on such a wet night, and special Thanks to Ralph for all his

hard work on the night, not only organising the collection of membership fees, but for producing and laminating the new membership cards. He also made the tea! A heroic effort all round.