



The January meeting was due to be addressed by Dr Brian Espey of Trinity college, but, due to illness, he was unable to attend. Luckily, we were able to get in contact with Prof. Philip Dufton, who had been due to give a lecture in December. This had been called off because of the adverse weather conditions. We are very grateful that Philip took the time to come along at very short notice.

The subject of Philip's talk was "40 Years of Astronomy", in which he reflected on his long career as both a university lecturer and as a working scientist. His speciality is "Hot Stars" and he alluded to this throughout his talk. Philip's career got off to a really lucky start, as his first supervisor had booked time on a large telescope in South Africa. He offered Philip the chance to make use of this time, which he duly did.

Philip had already decided that research into hot stars would be his subject, and he made the best use of this great opportunity, by studying the Magellanic clouds. He returned to Northern Ireland, where he has spent most of his career, although there have been occasional postings abroad.

As time progressed, Philip eventually became a lecturer at Q.U.B. and finally became Head of Department. He noted that, in the early days of his career, there were only a limited number of professional researchers scattered around the globe. The number of researchers nowadays can be measured in the thousands, and he noted that, especially in these days of limited funding, it is very difficult for a professional astronomer to hold down a post for any significant length of time. It is also very difficult to book any time on the large telescopes professionals need to carry out their research.

Meanwhile, Philip's research into hot stars was continuing. He described these objects in detail,

huge bright hot stars, which burn their nuclear fuel at a very fast rate. They often have lifetimes measured in million's rather than billion's, of years. Because they are so hot and bright, they can be seen over huge distances, and are useful for measuring intergalactic distances in space.

This was a fascinating, and somewhat glum, insight into the modern world of professional astronomy. The rate of new discoveries and information is increasing rapidly, but the opportunities to be involved are declining equally rapidly. Philip finished his talk by considering the question of whether he would like to be starting his career nowadays, and concluded that, although there are many exciting developments in modern astronomy, sadly, the thrill and excitement he knew as a junior researcher has now gone, to be replaced by a more business-like world dominated by the bottom line.