

# THE ADSTOCK SCIENCE CLUB



So far this year the world of science seems to be experiencing a mini renaissance with the (possible) discovery of the Higgs Boson, aka the “GOD Particle” which, in theory, gives all matter the property of mass. “Possible” because its discovery is still only a statistical probability, a high one, granted, but the actual particle is so small that even the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) hasn’t the power to “see” it directly. Someone said that using an atom smasher, such as the LHC, is like trying to see how a watch works by smashing it with a sledge hammer then trying to work out what all the bits do.

The next amazing event took place only a couple of months ago; the aptly named Curiosity Rover landed safely on Mars. No small accomplishment as at least seven previous attempts to land instruments on the Red Planet ended in failure. What is even more amazing though, is that its landing system included the “Sky Crane”, a rocket propelled platform able to hover a few metres above the Martian surface and gently lower the Curiosity Rover on cables to the surface, a first ever really “soft” landing.

Lastly, having recently mapped the human Genome, scientists have now discovered that what for years was considered to be junk DNA code is proving to be much more important. The “Junk” code appears to play an important part in switching various gene sequences on and off and this discovery, it is hoped, will lead to revolutionary ways in which various genetic disorders and diseases, such as Alzheimer’s, Cystic fibrosis etc. could be cured.

What about The Adstock Science Club, you say! Since my last article, Tony gave a brief talk about our visit to the “Central Laser Facility” in Didcot; another TASC member and I went to the Cheltenham Science Festival in June, following which I gave an equally fascinating talk about my adventures there; we had a young post-grad student, Parvathy Harikumar from Buckingham University give the group a talk about her research into skin cancer, and some members attended a talk at Buckingham University by Wing Commander Andy Green, who looks a little like Dan Dare, and is also a test pilot with the RAF. He is involved with the development and testing of the Bloodhound SSC jet powered car which replaces the current land speed record holder, Thrust SSC. He spoke about the history of breaking the speed record and the risks involved, particular when you are travelling at the speed of sound, or faster.

Wing Commander Andy Green currently holds the land speed record at 763 mph. The Bloodhound SSC, which is 17 metres long and 4 metres wide and powered by a Eurojet “Typhoon” engine in combination with a hybrid rocket engine will be able to reach speeds of over 1000mph, that’s faster than a speeding bullet from a Magnum. His friends call him “Dead Dog”, because they assume he won’t be around much longer, cheerful lot!

In August we had Mr Ron Dudley-Smith of the UK Dowsing Association give us a display of practical Dowsing. He had all seven of us wandering around with bent bits of wire trying to will them to point at all sorts of things, tubes filled with water, garden ornaments, and people. Mine kept on pointing at Sue from up East Street.

Lastly we had a public lecture by Dr Ellie Dommett, “Brain Science in the Real World” where she discussed brain development from infant to OAP, how our latest knowledge and understanding is being both used and abused, how drug use can affect the brain and what we can do to limit the damage old age can wreak on our minds – as yet, not a lot! This lecture gave us all much food for thought, if only I could remember what?

Anybody wanting further information about The Adstock Science Club and our future activities please call or email me.