

TASC Talk 21st March 2019

French Astronomy – by Mr Pierre Girard, Milton Keynes Astronomical Society.

French Astronomy evolved at a time when there was free diffusion of scientific ideas in Europe. Prominent scientists-astronomers like the first of the Cassini's were invited at the Royal Court for prestige but also to further their studies in a burgeoning area of enquiry. Astronomers also had to be surveyors at a time when boundaries were shifting constantly. Through exact scientific discipline, Jean-Dominique Cassini cost Louis XIV more territory than his warring neighbours had ever taken from him. It was not long before Astronomy moved under its own momentum helped by the development of photography and spectroscopy.

Our March Science talk, presented by Mr Pierre Girard of the Milton Keynes Astronomical Society was all about "French Astronomy". He began by introducing something that at first seemed a bit odd, the Eifel Tower. Now, I did not know this even though I've been to the Eifel Tower a number of times in the past, and that is, along the base of the first visitors' platform are inscribed the names of 72 French scientists, Engineers and Mathematicians. Some of whom had made great contributions to the science of Astronomy.

He then went on to elaborate about a number of these scientists such as Joseph-Louis Lagrange, Leon Foucault, Gaspard-Gustav de Coriolis and many more finishing with a short history of the Cassini's. You may remember that in 2017 the Cassini spacecraft, named after the family Cassini, made its final approach to Saturn and dove into the planet's atmosphere where it finally ended its mission.

He discussed the building of the first and subsequent Paris observatories and ended his talk with a discussion about the Carte du Ciel project, an international collaboration of scientists, astronomers and organisations which finances the design, building and operation of major ground and Space-based observatories.