

Keeping in touch in these difficult times

Although we are all in limbo until this country emerges more definitely from the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic I would like to update you on what your committee was doing before the lockdown was imposed and what we are hoping to have in next year's programme of lectures and visits.

Membership news

As a result of your continued support our membership numbers have remained comfortably above 200 during the past year and lecture attendances, until lockdown was initiated in March 2020, averaged out at an impressive 90 people.

The 2020/21 lecture programme

Malcolm Savidge was preparing another interesting and varied lecture programme for 2020/21 before everything had to be deferred as a result of the lockdown. He is hoping that the cancelled lectures that were arranged for March, April, May and June this year will be re-scheduled for the coming season and that these will be supplemented by additional lectures.

The current position is that we have asked Professor Andy Cundy if he is happy to re-schedule his cancelled talk on marine plastics for 10th March 2021. Malcolm has also contacted the speakers for our 2020 May and June lectures, that were to focus respectively on black holes and the Atikythera mechanism, to ask if they will be prepared to give their lectures in the coming season.

Other lecture topics that Malcolm is looking at range from developments in battery technology and artificial intelligence to the use of Aspirin in treating cancer. Other possibilities include a talk by Marcus de Soutoy entitled "Mathematics for everybody" as well as talks covering genetics, ecology, Corona viruses and epidemiology. However, he fully appreciates that it is inappropriate to try and pin speakers down to specific dates until there is more clarity regarding the ability to resume holding public lectures.

As I said in the last newsletter we normally have some space left in our usual RAU lecture theatre so do please tell your friends about future CSTS lectures and visits when we start again. We are always keen to attract younger attendees and, as I am sure you know, there is no charge for students.

The visits programme

As you might expect, it has been impossible for Daphne and Chris, our energetic visits organisers, to plan any trips until we are able to return to some sense of normality. Daphne tells me that she is proposing to re-book the RNLI visit on the assumption that things will be easier by this time next year. Similarly, she is hoping to be able to re-schedule the visit to the Gloucester Waste facility later this year or early next year. Do please keep checking for updated visits information on our website.

Financial position

An unaudited update, in April, indicates that our financial position remains strong and gives us the ability to fund more outreach grants and possibly subsidise one or more members' events. Do let us know if you have suggestions for a members' event next year or suggestions for STEM-related grants.

STEM-related outreach

We were continuing with the process of expanding our programme of small educational grants to schools and colleges in the Gloucestershire area before we had to put everything on hold in March. In September 2019 I sent out a letter to ten of the largest secondary schools in the local area introducing our society, inviting staff and pupils to our lectures and also giving them details of our STEM-related grants. We had an interested response from Denmark Road School in Gloucester but none of the other schools responded.

School grants approved and disbursed since the last newsletter include £550 to fund the costs of new microscopes for Deer Park school, Cirencester, as well as small educational grants to primary schools in Sheepscombe, Frampton Mansell and Oakridge. We have also received a request for a much larger grant of £2,500 to help fund a wind tunnel for the Berkeley Green UTC but the committee have asked for further information on this request but, unsurprisingly, we have heard no more from them since the start of lockdown.

The informal meeting planned for 24th March

It is a great pity that we had to cancel the informal meeting as I was hoping that we would have been able to discuss important aspects relating to the future of the society and, not least, encourage more of you to become involved with running our society. It is now vital that we fill the positions of Treasurer immediately and of Chair and Programme Secretary in 2021 as both these posts are becoming vacant.

Our website, digital initiatives and AGM

Very many thanks are due to Richard Gunner who continues to manage our [website](#) which is our vital means of communication now. Do let us know if you have any ideas for improvement or changes to the content or layout. Given the continued problems associated with the pandemic we have been considering ways in which we may be able to stream lectures to members. If anyone has knowledge and experience of suitable systems do please get in touch with suggestions of ways in which we may be able to do this successfully. We shall let you know the most appropriate time and method of holding the AGM in due course.

Contacts

Do please get in touch with me or any member of the committee with any ideas or suggestions for improving your society or with contributions to this newsletter and any of our activities.

*John Mulligan
CSTS Chair
May 2020*