

Meeting on March 7th 2018 – Speaker Dr Stephen Burt

Dr Stephen Burt from the Department of Meteorology at the University of Reading, talked about the weather records that have been kept since 1907. Rainfall and climate recordings were made at the London Road site of the University from 1908 until 1963, before they were moved to the Geography Department. Now there is a large observatory site, monitored daily, on the Whiteknights campus. Rainfall has been measured since 1908, grass frost since 1960 and wind speed and direction more recently. Barometric pressure and hours of sunshine are logged every second and sent to the Meteorology Office. This used to be in Bracknell until it was moved to Exeter several years ago. Even so, because of Reading's work over the years, the presence of the European Weather Station on the Shinfield Road and because the instruments used have improved in sensitivity and accuracy, the University's Meteorology Department is still the largest in Europe.

Because there is a detailed daily log of Reading's weather over the past century it has been possible to identify any unusual patterns or blips. For example 1903 was the wettest year, but November 2014 until November 2016 saw the wettest 2 year period. 1903 also coincided with a period of Saharan dust blowing across the town. The years 1927, 1940, 1947, 1962/3, 1981/2, 2008 and 2010/11 saw very heavy snowfalls. We should now also include March 2018! February 1929 saw the coldest day until 2010 although 6 January 1987 was the coldest day on record. January 10th 1940 saw the Thames freeze over and during the winter of 1962/3 the children had 3 months off school. In contrast July 1983 was the hottest month, even hotter than 2006, although one day in December 2015 was the hottest day ever in Reading! Since 1840 there have been 6 tornadoes that have hit Reading.

Amongst all the charts and data that we were given two items stand out. First, the decline of fog has been dramatic; the second is that this century has seen 16 of the warmest years of the last 25 years. However, when we were shown a graph of the weather over the past 100 years, it was clear that fears of a dramatic increase in global warming affecting Reading are exaggerated.