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Fylde boffin looks into the future

*By **Tyrone Marshall***

Comment

STARMAN: John Taylor

A scientist from the Fylde has captured a glimpse of the fate awaiting our solar system in a few billion years to come.

Astrophysicist John Taylor was part of a team of four scientists to observe a star 450 million light years from Earth that was once eight times the size of our Sun.

The solitary white dwarf star is orbited by a ring of metallic gas which the team at the University of Warwick claim is the remains of a planetary system.

The finding is important as it is the first time scientists have proved that planets have existed around these type of stars.

"This is a very significant discovery," said Mr Taylor, from Thornton Cleveleys.

"It shows us what we think our solar system will look like in about five to eight billion years. It helps us try to understand where our solar system came from."

The full research paper from the University of Warwick's Department of Physics was published in the journal Science on December 22 and word has spread around the world with articles published in a number of papers including the Iran Daily and Hindu Times.

Scientists predict that in the far-off future our Sun will swell to 200 times its size and destroy the Earth along with the planets of Mercury and Venus.

They believe other inner planets will be pushed out to a distant orbit during the process and it will result in the end of the Earth as we know it.

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Before the Sun completes its cycle it will shrink and become a white dwarf star like the one the scientists have studied.

Mr Taylor, 27, who is married to Gillian and works at the university, said he has been fascinated with science since he was a child.

He became interested in the subject as a pupil at Norbreck Primary School and then later at Montgomery High School in Bispham.

"I was always very good at science during school and it really interested me, especially physics and the planets," he said. "I went to uni as it seemed the right thing to do at the time, I did astronomy at St Andrew's in Scotland, then went on to do a PHD at Keele, near Stoke-on-Trent."

Mr Taylor, whose parents Joan and Malcolm still live in Thornton Cleveleys, said the team made the discovery last May and observed their finding for two months.

Gordon Bromage, a professor of astronomy at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, and the head of the university's Centre for Astrophysics, said: "It is a good new development in that it provides an example of a star system that is similar to ours, this kind of work has been going on around the world for many decades but this seems to be the first example that has been discovered. We first have to worry about the earth getting warmer through our own effects of global warming, which is on a much closer timescale."

1:57pm Thursday 4th January 2007

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