

## Interview with Patrick Moore on Colchester Hospital Radio, 1986 Acc SA653

*Interviewer: Patrick Moore, famous astronomer from television, is in the eastern counties this week. He's been talking at the Cambridge Institute. Patrick - Halley's Comet. What is the actual title of it, is it Halley's, Hauley's, or Hayley's?*

Patrick Moore: Well it certainly isn't Hayley. Hayley is or was a pop group. It probably should be Hauley, but most people call it Halley, so I think I will. Remember the old, old rhyme: of all the comets in the sky, there's none like comet Halley, we see it with a naked eye, and periodic-ally.

*Interviewer: But now you've changed this rhyme, haven't you? Because the sightings have not been quite so good on this particular pass of the comet, have they?*

Patrick Moore: They haven't. The comet comes back once every 75 to 76 years. And it was last around in 1910. And generally, it's a brilliant naked eye object, as it was in 1910. And of course, many people remember it, but this time, by a piece of very bad cosmic arrangement - about which I've complained bitterly - the earth and the comet went in the wrong places at the wrong times. And therefore the comet has not been at all brilliant at this time, and it won't be. And we've altered the rhyme, and it goes now like this: of all the comets in the sky, there's none like comet Hauley, we've seen it with the naked eye, but this time rather poorly.

*Interviewer: Halley's Comet, though, is just one of several comets - is that right - that's floating around?*

Patrick Moore: What in fact is a comet? Well, a comet is quite different from a planet. A planet is a solid body, either solid and rocky, like the Earth, or mainly liquid and gas like Jupiter or Saturn. And the comet is quite different. The only massive part is the nucleus, which has been described as a dirty ice ball. And it really is made up of ice, mainly ordinary water ice, and is only a few miles across, in the case of Halley's Comet, probably less than ten miles across. And when the comet is a long way from the sun, which it is for most of the time, it is simply a dirty ice ball and you can't see it. But it moves in a very long, narrow path, or orbit. And when the comet comes in to the sun, it becomes warmed, the ice in the nucleus starts to boil off, and the nucleus surrounds herself with a coma or head made up of dusty particles and very thin gas. And there may be a tail, or tails, streaming away from the comet. And that in fact is what a comet is. And believe me a comet is quite harmless. And people have said to me, what would happen if the Earth was struck by a comet? Well, I suppose it could call local damage, but so far as destroying the world was concerned, well, you might just as well try to disturb a charging hippopotamus by throwing a baked bean at it.