

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh Journal

No 52 – March 2007

Web version at
<http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org/publications/journals/52>



*“The comet must be near that vapour trail”
– only there was no vapour trail, just comet C/2006 P1 McNaught!
Ian Robson of the Royal Observatory Edinburgh took this picture
on 2007-01-11 during a stay in Seattle, WA. The grey insert
is at the same scale, with a smooth background removed.*

In this issue: Papers for the AGM on 2007-03-16:
Invitation and agenda – Minutes of last year’s AGM – Annual Report for 2006

From the editor

This issue includes the paperwork that the Society sends to each member prior to the Annual General Meeting. In the following pages you find the Secretary's letter detailing the agenda and nominations for Council, the minutes of last year's AGM, and the Annual Report for 2006 with the accounts and the examiner's report on the accounts. The Annual Report is also available separately – as PDF or paper copy. I should like to thank the Council of the Society for making it possible to include this material in the Journal. Their schedule is quite packed at this time of year with the financial year ending on 31 December and the AGM having to be held before April.

Some members might want to help saving a tree and opt out of receiving a paper copy altogether. If the web version is good enough for you and you don't want to have to throw away the paper copy, then let me know. One suggestion following the last issue has been to alert members by email when the new issue is available on the web site. The Society records show email addresses for just over half the members, but some of these will be out of date – I know mine is. If you have an email address, perhaps you could just confirm it again to the Society, either the Secretary or myself.

With the previous issue, I sent a questionnaire that the Secretary and Council had prepared in order to canvass views of members. Some people who picked up the Journal paper copy at the December meeting may not have got the questionnaire. You can fill in the questionnaire on the web. To avoid hackers and spammers making use of this opportunity, the web location is not published on the web: <<http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org/feedback>>. Once you have the form in your web browser, you can also download a PDF file and print your own paper copy to fill in.

Horst Meyerdierks
<editor@astronomyedinburgh.org>

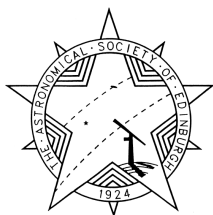
Recent observations

Comet McNaught

In spite of Alan Pickup's mention of this comet in his monthly preview of the sky, many were unprepared for it on January 10. At 16:45 that day the ROE Visitor Centre invited staff with the words "Perfect view of comet from rooftop, right now - come along!", but by the time Horst Meyerdierks read this it was too late. Douglas Cooper from Stirling was alerted by a colleague and saw it looking out from the office. Des Loughney saw it the same night without expecting it.

The next evening only few at ROE caught a very short glimpse of C/2006 P1 McNaught. Ian Robson had read the ROE internal message in Seattle and observed and photographed the comet on January 11. But many missed it altogether, including Horst and Bill Ward who on January 11 both stared at similar cloud banks from Blackford Hill and Kelvinside, resp.

Iain McEachran – editor of the Scottish Astronomers Group Magazine – also missed the comet, but a friend of his passed on a picture taken by Colin Smith of Edinburgh.



The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh

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105/19 Causewayside
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2007 March 04

Annual General Meeting – March 16th 2007

The Annual General Meeting of the Society has been called for March 16th. It will be held at 8pm at the City Observatory. The agenda is:

- Apologies
- Minutes of the AGM of 17th March 2006
- Presentation of Annual Report and Accounts
- Election of Office Bearers and Council Nominations have been received for:
 - President: Iain McEachran
 - Vice President: Daniel Gallacher
 - Secretary: Graham Rule
 - Treasurer: Alan Ellis
 - Council Members: Maurice Frank, Des Loughney, Pete Macdonald, David Small, Adelaide Webster, Kenneth Thomas
- AOB

Graham Rule BSc MBCS MIET FRAS
Secretary of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on March 17th 2006

The meeting was opened at 20:05 by Des Loughney in the presence of 20 members.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Frank Howie, Ray and May Fenouhlet.

Minutes of the AGM of 25th March 2005

The minutes of the previous AGM having been circulated were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

(But Earlyburn is spelled with a y rather than an i.)

Proposed: Lorna McCalman

Seconded: Alan Pickup

Annual Report and Accounts for 2005

These were formally presented.

Graham spoke to the narrative report.

Alan noted some points about the Accounts. He noted that the figure for income from the Lorimer Trust is incorrect. It appears that another donation was banked at the same time and these had both been noted as being from the Trust.

The Society are trying to move the deposit account away from the Bank of Scotland. We have had problems with changing the signatories and their interest rates are poor.

Despite the 80 % reduction we get as a charity, we are still having to pay a considerable sum to the City. We have applied for a discretionary rebate for the other 20 % but will not get this for the current year.

The electricity bill is very high. Partly this was because of underestimated billing for some time. But there does appear to be quite a high use of power even when we are not here (20 units per day seems typical).

Duncan Hale-Sutton asked if the money we have could be passed back to the Trust. It was felt that we are more likely to need to get money from the Trust.

There was discussion about the number of members we had. It was noted that we had kept some people on our membership list after they had failed to pay their subscription. This has now been rectified.

Des spoke about investment strategies. It was noted that the Trust rearranged their portfolio a few years ago.

Charlie Gleed pointed out to Des some time back that the Cooke refractor was in need of refurbishment. Des has started to find out who could do the necessary work. The Cooke in Dundee is about to be refurbished and it has been suggested by Dave Gavine that we should use this company "Heritage

Engineering”. The Officials in the City have recommended that we apply for a grant for this from the North and Leith Development Committee. Des will meet the official of the committee to discuss this. An initial examination would cost about £500 and the main work could cost around £5000.

Des noted that the buildings are in a serious state of disrepair. The City claim to be able to come up with funds for the Calton Hill project but this will be spread over the next five or six years. If we accept these assurances then it is worth staying at the Observatory. But if we don't believe them then we should consider moving elsewhere.

Des also noted that we need to draw people into the Society. Having a good programme of meetings is needed as are specialist meetings. Open Evenings help greatly. He noted that Evening Classes in Stirling and Dundee help them recruit. Dave Gavine might be able to give classes. There would be a fee charged for this.

Graham said that he didn't trust the City. He was not optimistic that the work would get done in a reasonable timescale. David Small said that we had to put together a plan.

Duncan said that we should start leaving now.

Danny proposed that we set a two year timescale for seeing action from the City. If that period expired then we would have to have a plan to leave.

Lorna suggested that we advertise meetings in the local press.

Steuart said that we need to send a more detailed report to the members of the Society and Ken said we needed to have a questionnaire asking members (and perhaps former members) what they want.

We need to clarify our legal position.

The Society's Council will have a report to members available within six months.

Election of Office Bearers and Council

Completed nominations had been received for the following posts:

- President: Des Loughney
- Vice-President: Iain McEachran, David Small
- Secretary: Graham Rule
- Treasurer: Alan Ellis
- Council Member: Maurice Frank, Danny Gallacher, Pete MacDonald, Alastair Mackie, Ken Thomas, Adelaide Webster

As there were no more nominations than places an election was not required.

AOB

Best wishes from George Grant.

Duncan Hale-Sutton has suggested that notices be sent electronically.

The next meeting is on 7th April at which Alan Pickup will be speaking on “Saturn and Cassini”.

Closed 22:00

Astronomical Society of Edinburgh – Annual Report for 2006

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh was founded (as the Edinburgh Astronomical Association) in 1924 and is governed by a Constitution adopted in 1937 and since modified (most recently on 13th January 1995). A copy of this Constitution has been supplied to each member and may be referred to in the Society's Library at the City Observatory and on the Society's web site. Copies may be obtained from the Secretary.

Clause 1 of that Constitution is:

The name of the Society shall be "The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh" and its objects shall be to advance the education of the public about the science of Astronomy and to promote astronomical research chiefly in Edinburgh and its neighbourhood. In furtherance thereof:

- (a) to circulate information on astronomical matters by the publication of articles, books etc.;*
- (b) to encourage astronomical study and observation; and*
- (c) to increase popular interest in astronomy.*

The Management of the Society is vested in a Council, elected from the Ordinary Membership of the Society. The following served from 1st April:

- President: Des Loughney
113 Kingsknowe Road North, Edinburgh EH14 2DQ
Telephone: 0131 477 0817
Email: desloughney@blueyonder.co.uk
- Secretary: Graham Rule
105/19 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1QG
Telephone: 0131 667 0647
Email: Graham.Rule@ed.ac.uk
- Treasurer: Alan Ellis
10 Greenbank Gdns, Edinburgh, EH10 5SL
Telephone: 0131 447 9968
E-Mail: alan.ellis@blueyonder.co.uk
- Vice-Presidents:
Iain McEachran, David Small
- Councillors:
Maurice Frank, Danny Gallacher, Pete MacDonald, Alastair Mackie, Ken Thomas, Adelaide Webster

The following Council members held office during the early part of the year (from 1st January to March 31st): Des Loughney, Iain McEachran, David Small, Graham Rule, Alan Ellis, Maurice Frank, Danny Gallacher, Pete MacDonald, Alastair Mackie, Ken Thomas, Adelaide Webster.

The Society's principal address

c/o Graham Rule
105/19 Causewayside
Edinburgh, EH9 1QG
Telephone 0131 667 0647

Our meetings take place at

The City Observatory
Calton Hill
Edinburgh EH7 5AA
Telephone 0131 556 4365

There is currently no post box at the observatory which the post office can reach.

Membership

On the 31st December 2006 the membership of the Society was 75 of which 6 are honorary members.

Honorary Members

Honorary members are Dr M. Brück, Dr H. Ford MBE, Dr D. Gavine, and Prof D. Heggie. The Honorary Presidents are Prof Andy Lawrence BSc PhD FRAS FRSE (Regius Professor of Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh) and Prof John Brown BSc PhD DSc FRSE FRAS (Astronomer Royal for Scotland).

Publications

Editions 50 and 51 of the Society's Journal were published in 2006 under the editorship of Dr D.M. Gavine and Dr H. Meyerdierks, resp.

Members are issued with the latest edition of the Federation of Astronomical Societies "Astrocalendar" on payment of their subscription to the Society.

Electronic Communication

The Society's website may be found at <http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org/>

Email contact addresses have also been set up for some Society Officers:

- president@astronomyedinburgh.org
- secretary@astronomyedinburgh.org
- treasurer@astronomyedinburgh.org

Full details of the Society's activities and information about how to join are on the website.

Details of Society meetings are available on our answering machine at 0131 556 4365.

The Council expresses its thanks to the Royal Observatory Edinburgh for continuing to provide web space and email forwarding.

Meetings

The Society has held the following meetings during 2006:

January	6th	Roger Stapleton – St.Andrews University The St.Andrews University Observatory Instruments – past and present
	20th	Open Evening
February	3rd	Melvyn Taylor – Leeds AS Blinking Stars!
	17th	Open Evening
March	3rd	Des Loughney – ASE Presidential Address – Brown Dwarfs
	17th	Annual General Meeting and Open Evening
	29th	Partial Solar Eclipse
April	7th	Alan Pickup – ASE Saturn and Cassini
	21st	Open Evening
May	5th	Gerry Taylor – ASE Extreme Stars
	19th	Open Evening
	20th	Scottish Astronomers Group Meeting Lecture by Alan Cayless of the Stirling Astronomical Society about his experiences as a tutor at the Open University on their student practical astronomy programme at an observatory in Majorca.
June	2nd	Ron Livesey – BAA Space Weather
July	7th	Neil Grubb – ASE Its not Rocket Science
August	4th	Members' Night Short presentations by members of the Society
September	1st	Dr John Davies – ROE Is Pluto a Planet?
October	6th	Tom Boles – Past President, BAA Supernova Discoveries
	11th	Evening Class The History of Astronomy
	18th	Evening Class The Sun and Sun Spots
November	1st	Evening Class The Moon

November	3rd	Alex Pratt – Leeds AS Video observations of meteors
	8th	Evening Class Inner Planets (Mercury / Venus / Earth / Mars)
	15th	Evening Class Jupiter and Saturn – and their moons
	22nd	Evening Class Meteors and Aurorae
	29th	Evening Class Comets
December	1st	Graham Dale – The Mars Society Latest News from the Mars Probes
	6th	Evening Class Neptune, Uranus and the dwarf planets

The Council wishes to thank Alan Pickup for kindly presenting the “Monthly Sky Map” talk to the Society whenever he was available. Thanks also go to Dave Gavine for arranging speakers for many of the meetings.

Council Meetings

The Council of the Society met on 27th January, 10th February, 14th April, 26th May, 30th June, 28th July, 25th August, 29th September and 27th October.

Observatory

Last year we reported that there had been discussions with the Council regarding the state of the buildings that the ASE leases. It was hoped that progress would be made in 2006 in dealing with these issues. It is with regret that we have to report that no progress has been made. No repair and refurbishment work has been started apparently because of the City of Edinburgh Council’s lack of finance.

The situation has got worse and having a serious impact on the Society’s activities. We had a program of observing nights when the Playfair building was open to the public. This program had proved to be popular. The program had to be cancelled because in the summer part of the ceiling in the Playfair building fell down denying access to the Cooke telescope – our main working telescope. A further consequence was the postponement of our plan to refurbish the telescope in 2006. It might have been possible to show people features of the night sky using other equipment. This possibility has been ruled out by the failure of the plumbing system on Calton Hill. There are no operational toilets and no drinking water. We have no idea when the City Council will carry out these basic repairs.

If the Society wishes to have a program of showing the Moon and the planets through telescopes and binoculars to the public, including families, in 2007, then it should seriously contemplate organising this at other venues which have access to basic facilities such as toilets.

After giving up the Earlyburn site the Society has been seeking access to a ‘dark sky’ site somewhere within reasonable driving distance of Edinburgh. We have been offered access to a ‘darker sky’ site near Cobbinshaw reservoir in West Lothian. The site is owned by a model aeroplane society complete with a car park, runway and hut. The financial terms of the access are still being negotiated.

Observing

The programme of opening the Observatory to the public had gone well in the early part of 2006. It had been halted for the summer months with the intention of resuming in August. The roof fall referred to in the previous section prevented this from happening. At the time of writing this is a shame as Saturn moves into a favourable viewing position.

There are two major astronomical events scheduled for 2007 which will attract public interest. Hopefully something can be organised despite the state of Calton Hill. These events are the total eclipse of the Moon on Saturday March 3rd and the opposition of Mars in December.

During the course of the year members of the public and Society members were trained on the use of the Society's instruments and how to observe variable stars and other objects. The Society helped the Sunday Times prepare an article on Scottish astronomical societies in March 2006. A talk was delivered to photography students at Stevenson College on astrophotography with the new generation of digital cameras.

Night Classes

The ASE was aware of the success of the astronomy night classes organised in Stirling and Dundee. We were also aware that talks were offered by the ROE. Nevertheless it was thought that the public would be interested in a programme of night classes in Edinburgh at the Calton Hill site. A series of night classes were organised in the autumn on the general theme of the 'Solar System'. They were attended by an average of 7 people per session. Our thanks go to all those who made the classes possible.

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh Trustees

A former Vice-President of the Society, Mr John Henry Lorimer RSA left a substantial bequest to the Society when he died in 1936. This bequest has been assigned to "The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh Trustees" and is managed by them under conditions set forth in a Deed of Trust granted in favour of Rev Dr James Patrick DD BSc and others, dated 10th December 1937.

The following are the trustees in terms of that deed:

- Mr Raymond Fenoulhet (Secretary and Treasurer)
- Dr John Rostron
- Dr David Gavine FRAS
- Dr John Hunter
- Mr Alan Pickup

All of the above trustees are members of the Society.

Financial Report

I am pleased to report that this year's annual report is the first for a long time that shows a surplus rather than the usual deficit. The surplus of £662.80 is entirely due to the decision by the City of Edinburgh Council to grant the Society full discretionary relief for its rates liability. The relief was backdated to 2005 and will be reviewed again in March 2008. We have received a full refund of last year's payment and along with a zero rates bill this year means we are around £2,800 better off than we would have been at the end of 2006.

The main items of expenditure are now the electricity use (£841.40) and insurance costs (£622.46).

Our main source of income continues to be from our membership subscriptions this year amounting to £1086 and secondly from donations this year of £620.

Errata Note for last year's 2005 Annual Accounts:

It was reported on last year's statement that £1135 had been received from the ASE Trust from the Lorimer foundation. It was pointed out by the Treasurer of the ASE Trust that only £570 had actually been paid to the Society in 2005. We have since discovered that this payment was made up of a number of cheques paid as a single transaction on the Bank Statement – The amounts were £570 from the Lorimer Trust, £500 donation from Fresh Air FM and £65 as membership subscriptions paid in March 2005.

The form of presentation of this report conforms to the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1992, which also requires the following statements to be made:

i. Nature and purpose of each of the major funds:

Current Account: Bank of Scotland Treasurer's Account

Investment: Bank of Scotland Business Investment Account

ii. Remuneration and expenses of trustees

(this refers to members of the ASE Council): £378.84

This money was paid to Council members by the Treasurer on presentation of receipts for costs incurred on Society business.

Statement of Balances for the Year Ended 31 December 2006

Bank Balance at 31 December 2005		
Current Account	739.31	
Business Investment Account	7408.51	
Total balance		8147.82
Less Liabilities for 2005 (1)		69.50
Plus receipts for 2006		3456.36
Less payments for 2006		2793.56
		8741.12
Balances at 31 December 2006		
Current Account	3297.44	
Business Investment Account	5443.68	
Total balance		8741.12

Income and Expenditure Report for 2006

Income		£
Subscriptions		1086.00
Donations (5)		620.00
Gift Aid (2)		290.23
Bank Interest		
Current Account	14.30	
Business Investment Account	35.17	
		49.47
Rates Rebate (2005)		1410.66
Lorimer Trust Income (4)		0.00
Total Income		3456.36
Expenditure		£
Astrocalendars (3)		338.93
Astronomy Magazines		139.40
Hospitality (13)		223.65
Equipment Purchases (8)		43.87
Insurance (6)		622.46
Subscriptions (10)		52.50
Rates		0.00
Repairs & Maintenance		
ASE Equipment (9)	82.88	
Observatory	0.00	
		82.88
Mailing & Stationery		113.95
Travel Expenses (12)		81.90
Utilities		
Electricity	841.40	
Gas (11)	0.00	
Telephone (7)	252.62	
		1094.02
Total Expenditure		2793.56
Income – Expenditure		662.80

Note on Statement of Balances and Income and Expenditure Report

At the 31st December 2006 one cheque had not been cleared. This represents a liability for the Society of £17.50.

- Cheque number 011839 for £17.50 to Graham Rule for travel expenses.

General Notes:

1. The 2005 liability of £69.50 represents cheque payments made during 2005 but not cleared until 2006.
2. The Gift Aid Tax receipt is for the two Inland Revenue Tax years 2004/5 and 2005/6.
3. The Astrocalendars payment also represents two years (2005 and 2006) and so is double the usual amount.
4. Lorimer Trust Income from interest earned on ASE Trust assets is usually requested by the ASE Treasurer from the ASE Trust. None was requested by the Society this year but a request is planned in 2007 backdated to 2006.
5. The bulk of donations came from radio groups and other organisations such as Unique Events for use of the Observatory premises. Cash from the donations box in the Playfair Building amounted to £120 over the year.
6. The insurance provision covers General Contents of £6,339 and specified items of individual equipment ranging from £1,654 to £3,184. Also included is public liability cover of £5m.
7. The base quarterly telephone bill is reduced by £20 per quarter due to cancellation of rental of handset equipment and cancellation call minder facility. This has been replaced by a private handset and answering machine at the Observatory provided by courtesy of Graham Rule.
8. Equipment purchases of £43.87 were for a replacement vacuum cleaner and timers for observatory heating.
9. Equipment repairs & maintenance of £82.88 was for the slide projector.
10. Subscriptions of £52.50 was for annual membership for the Society of the Federation Astronomical Societies.
11. The gas bill of zero is due to overpayment on a previous bill in 2005.
12. Travel expenses of £81.90 is for speakers at Members meetings.
13. Hospitality of £225.65 is for speakers' meals (£187.50) and general meeting refreshments of £36.15.

This report was approved at a meeting of the Council of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh held at the City Observatory on 23rd February 2007

Des Loughney, President

For and on behalf of the Council of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

to the members of the ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

I have examined the accounts of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh, and according to the best of my knowledge and belief in accordance with the information and explanations given to me, confirm that they have been properly prepared from the records of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh and are in agreement therewith and comply with The Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1992.

David Thomson

25/2/2007

Please address correspondence to the Secretary at
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Observing through the years

It's a little scary to think how long I've been passionate about astronomy. 'First Light' was probably not much under half a century ago, I can hardly believe it, when my parents took me Christmas shopping all the way from home in Dunfermline to Glasgow. I (think I) clearly remember watching the Moon in the sky from the back of the car, amazed that it was visible by day, throughout the hours of the journey – cars were slower in these days!

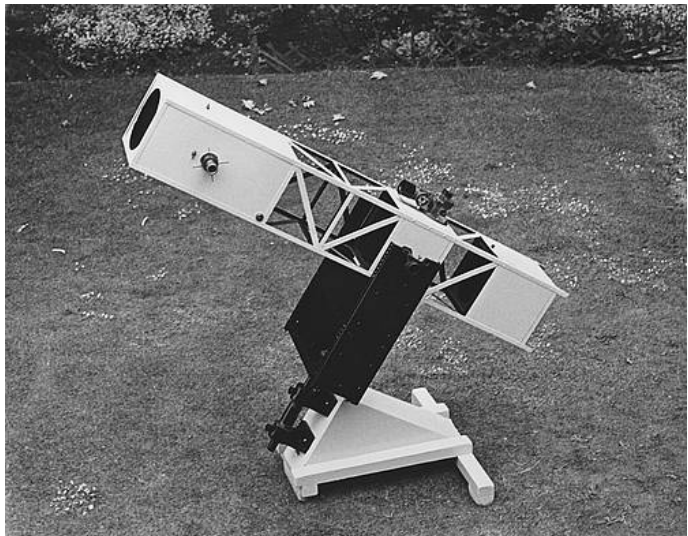
Fortuitous for me, or maybe it was 'in my stars', the Santa in residence at the big department store we were heading for somehow managed to find for me in his sack a book called 'A Child's Book of Stars'. All the way home I read every word of it several times, flicked back and forward through the colourful pictures and squinted out of the car windows at the real stars, trying to make the connections and wondering if anyone I or my parents knew could help me find the North Star. There were none! Fortunately for me the seed of my new interest was planted on that journey and by that book.

Fast-forwarding through more than a few decades, a few months ago I was browsing the Internet and came across the Annual Address of the Director of NASA. In it he referred to that very book as his introduction to astronomy and space. He also added that just about everything in it was 'wrong', but the seed was planted and his future course set. Fortunately I managed to find and buy a copy of that long out-of-print book on the Internet. Maybe I should contact NASA and suggest they invite me out to chat about our common origins ...

But enough of the nostalgia! Becoming a student at the University of Edinburgh in the mid-1960s I soon realised that while taking an astronomy/physics degree had seemed the obvious choice, I 'couldn't do the sums' and so switched to a less mathematical degree, ecological science, while The University Astro Soc kept me in touch with my 'first love'.

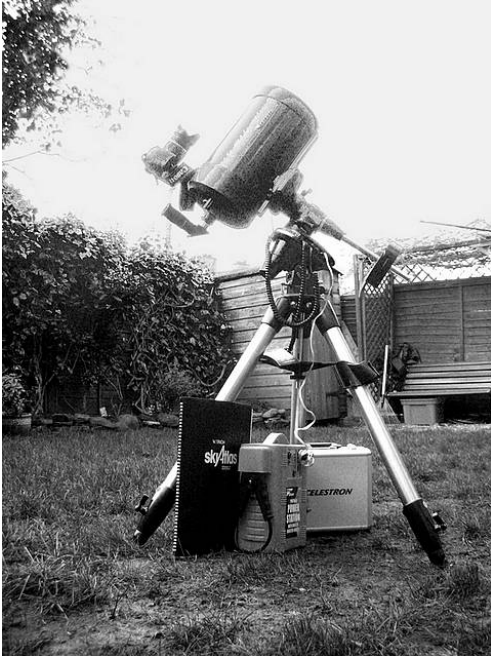
At that time, while most of my fellow students were getting plastered at the University Union and, if they were really lucky, meeting young ladies – it was 'The 60s' after all – I was using ex-WW2 binoculars from a local junk shop and a 2 inch / 50 mm refractor, on a 'blancmange' mount, bought from Charles Frank, an instrument company in Glasgow. The 'blancmange' term was, I think, coined

by Patrick Moore one night in the mid 1960s on the BBC's 'Sky at Night' – the connection is that both wobble! The Moon showed up quite well, but then I had nothing to compare it with. That's not quite true. My school pal, Terry, one of the few other people in our then very small world of amateur astronomy had a 3 inch 'genuine achromatic' telescope, on a pillar-and-claw mount. His 'astronomical' knowledge of the stars complemented my solar system focus and we moved on, still in the very small world – as we knew it – of amateur astronomy. In fact, neither of us knew any other person, school kid or adult, with an interest in the stars. Actually, there was one other – Ron – but he was already a real scientist, and he had a 6 and a half inch Newtonian. He had girlfriends too ... but I won't go into that. Anyway, I built my own telescope from scratch whereas he just bought his with the big salary that his employer Ferranti paid him. No, I wasn't jealous, not at all ...



8 inch Newtonian on home-made equatorial fork mount.

The next step came when I discovered in the local library in Dunfermline, to my amazement, a three volume set of books called, 'Amateur Telescope Making' or 'ATM' as it became affectionately known by its founders at 'Stellafane', in Vermont. I was hooked! Here was the way a penniless student could acquire a 'big' telescope. I managed to find and buy – for a pittance – two porthole windows from Ward's ship-breaking yard in nearby Inverkeithing. Somehow I managed to find a supplier of the necessary carborundum in several grades to grind the mirror and within a few months a 6 inch / 150 mm Newtonian reflector began to take shape. Sort of! I managed to work through the grinding stages to achieve a spherical mirror. Achieving the parabolic stage took a little longer; in fact I don't think I ever achieved the mirror 'wave-length' or the level of 'perfection' I had planned, but it worked!



8 inch Schmidt-Cassegrain on German equatorial goto mount.

I made a fork equatorial mount with hardwood and scrap-yard car axles. The 'drive' was neither clockwork nor electrical ... the manual 'nudge-nudge' method was used to more or less counteract the Earth's rotation. While fine for visual observing, photography was another matter. However, if not examined too closely, short time-exposures on a camera piggyback mounted on the telescope resulted in surprisingly good night 'sky-scapes'. Re-visiting today some of those old black and white FP3 and Tri-X negatives (yes, there was life before digital) it's obvious that light pollution was far, far less of a problem in mid-1960s Dunfermline where I lived than it is now, and bears no comparison to the grossly light polluted skies that I now have, 'even in Morningside'. But more of that later.

'Size matters' ... meaning of course that we astronomers, in our quest for knowledge of heavenly bodies, continually seek larger instruments. An 8 inch Newtonian was the logical, or at least the affordable, next step for me. (See first photograph). This time I bought a ready-made quality mirror and 'flat' from the acclaimed instrument maker,

H. Wildey, recommended by the British Astronomical Association which I had recently joined. The resulting 'scope was mounted on another and slightly heavier home-made equatorial mount, using the established formula of car axle bits for the mount, angle-aluminium lengths for the telescope open-tube construction and wood. It was the best telescope I'd ever had and I used it extensively over the next few years, contributing in a small way to advancing our knowledge of, primarily, the Moon and planets, through observations and drawings (photography was still a few years in my future) via my membership of the BAA Lunar Section. By this time I was also active in our Astronomical Society of Edinburgh – I think my title was 'Acting Director of the Lunar Section' – for a year or so, and I had the honour of meeting Patrick Moore, V.A. Firsoff and other 'names' from the astronomy world. In 1970 I sold the telescope and left Edinburgh for Canada, specifically Vancouver and studied for a Master's at the University of British Columbia from 1970-72, with 'only' binoculars to maintain the astronomy interest.

Vancouver suffered its own levels of light pollution, but escape into semi-wilderness mountain country was comparatively easy. Travelling a little further into magnificent 'alpine' country such as Garibaldi Provincial Park, I saw, for the first time in my life, the Milky Way as it deserves to be seen – 7th magnitude stars were visible to the naked eye – even mine, just a little damaged by over-long Moon gazing! That magnitude limit has been achieved by me only a few times since. On one occasion I equalled it – this was in the Pyrenees while staying at a Spanish friend's cabin – and

again on a very rare ‘night to die for’ in the Cairngorms, while camping in Glenmore Campsite, near Aviemore. I recall my young son stepping out of the camper van door and visibly recoiling in shock at the ‘black hole’ he had stepped into! Once we had both dark-adapted, that memorable line from my favourite film, ‘2001 Space Odyssey’, came to mind ... ‘My God it’s filled with stars’.

My personal wish list for the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh

An ASE interactive website

Develop an interactive website alongside or within the existing ASE website. This is a great means of communication with other members – sharing observing notes, equipment reviews, observing alerts etc.

Astro-imaging

Digital astro-imagers, as indicated by the number of active websites dedicated to it, seem to be so much more active than I’m aware of amongst ASE members. I hope I’m wrong! Why do these astro-imagers in Edinburgh and nearby not consider joining ASE? I only know of a handful of active astro-imagers in our society whereas the astro-imaging sites appear to have many more members actively communicating on their websites.

Education and learning

The Society should develop relevant teaching modules – possibly credit-earning, though not necessarily. As a competent photographer and now a digital photographer I look forward to making a ‘great leap forward’ into digital astro photography. I can make the images, but practical sessions in image processing using software such as ‘Registax’, under the informal tutoring of more advanced fellow members, would be great! I’d even pay real money for such assistance. Even if only in the form of buying a few drinks for the ‘demonstrators’!

Evening/weekend classes

I’d like to see the Society develop more evening or weekend classes. Studying for a distance learning module is OK, but I’d prefer an interactive, face to face approach. Getting my head around contemporary astronomy and cosmology, for example is something I’d like to tackle and maybe even achieve. To maintain a friendly, informal manner, I’d suggest these sessions might be held in a local pub ... I know of one with a where we’d be very welcome – since my son is the proprietor! www.themeadowbar.co.uk in Buccleuch Street.

Field trips / excursions

Some members already do this individually and collectively e.g. eclipse chasing. Might this be possible on a group basis, e.g. for spectaculars such as eclipses via package flights to more distant locations at group rates, maybe?

Practical observing – a dark skies site

It’s great news that the Society may be acquiring shared use of a dark skies site. I certainly look forward to making use of it and hope that it can be a place for individual, and also co-operative

observing and learning. The bonus of a 'warm hut' will be great! To maximise use I hope keys can be issued to signed-up members, if necessary for a fee, so we can make use of it whenever nature – i.e. clear skies – calls.

Social occasions

Star parties / star camps / Stellafanes etc. can be great social and learning experiences. Participants can get to know other amateur astronomers' interests and expertise and can greatly benefit from chatting face to face. I hope we can organise such things. At least one per year, or preferably more, e.g. every 'season'. I recently went to a star camp at Kielder Forest. The weather was atrocious – continuous heavy rain – but the atmosphere was great, pushing each others cars out of the mud etc! These events could perhaps be advertised to non-members/the general public and might lead to new members joining us.

Widening membership

Last year I helped 'that other place' on Blackford Hill, the Royal Observatory, with its concept of 'Roving Astronomers'. On a cold winter's night some 30-plus passers-by turned up and every one of them said to Us-Three-Astronomers that they had a great experience. It received coverage in local papers.

Links with the Royal Observatory Edinburgh

ROE holds well-attended talks (for a fee), runs evening viewing sessions (for a fee), has a visitor centre, campaigns for 'Dark Skies' etc., quite apart from its priority commitments to professional astronomy. Can we collaborate with ROE? Can we complement ROE?

Pub nights

Especially while our premises at Calton Hill are partially out of use, could we consider meeting in a convivial pub (or other) premises? The Meadow Bar on Buccleuch Street has a pleasant upstairs bar that can be booked for free (!) and as my son is the proprietor, that would be easy to arrange! He would expect some fine beverages and maybe the odd packet of crisps (or better food) to be consumed.

A network of observing sites

My City back garden is flooded with light, most of the time I probably won't be able to dash out to our (prospective) dark skies site. I'd like to know if any fellow members have secret observing sites in and around the City that they'd be prepared to share with others. Yes, I know we astronomers are solitary, contemplative creatures of the night, but getting together occasionally might be pleasant and productive.

'Clear Skies' and a 'New Dawn' to all fellow members of ASE!

Frank Howie
<frankhowie@hotmail.com>

ROE in new research council

The Government is creating a new research council, into which the UK Astronomy Technology Centre (UK ATC) – the main constituent of the Royal Observatory Edinburgh (ROE) – will transfer. The new council will come into existence on 2007-04-01. It was known provisionally as the “Large Facilities Council”, but has now been named the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC). It will concentrate the large physics and astronomy research facilities in one council. Such large facilities include the UK involvement in e.g. the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Southern Observatory (ESO). To this end the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) and the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC) will merge, and responsibility for nuclear physics will transfer from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to the new council. Following pressure from the science community PPARC’s grant funding will remain with the new council and not be transferred to EPSRC.

The two top jobs in the new council have been awarded to Prof. Keith Mason and Prof. John Wood. Mason, who is the Chief Executive of PPARC, is Chief Executive designate of the new council. Wood, who is the Chief Executive of CCLRC, is Director, International Relations, designate, of the new council.

In the mid 1990s the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) had been split up into EPSRC, PPARC, CCLRC and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). In 1998 SERC/PPARC closed the Royal Greenwich Observatory (RGO) in Cambridge and transformed the Royal Observatory Edinburgh into the UK ATC, reducing its responsibility to developing astronomical instrumentation. Since then the name of the ROE is kept alive jointly by the UK ATC, the Institute for Astronomy of the University of Edinburgh (IfA) and the ROE Visitor Centre. Following its creation the UK ATC experienced a period of steady growth. But this came to an end in 2005 when it had to lay off staff due to cuts to PPARC’s astronomical instrumentation programme.

Reference:

- <http://www.newrc.research-councils.ac.uk>

Horst Meyerdierks

Forthcoming events

The following events take place at the City Observatory, Calton Hill, Edinburgh (CHO), or at the Royal Observatory, Blackford Hill (ROE).

The meetings on Calton Hill are open to the public. The syllabus of talks has not yet been finalised, the April meeting may be on Good Friday (2007-04-06) or the Friday thereafter (2007-04-13). Please check the Society web site (<http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org>) and the answering machine on 0131-556.4365 closer to the time for updates.

The BAA Meeting on 2007-05-05 is open to members of the Society, but registration and payment will be required for lunch. Please check for more details closer to the time.

2007-03-02	20:00	Des Loughney	Star spots
	CHO	President, Astronomical Society of Edinburgh	
2007-03-03	evening		Total lunar eclipse
	CHO		partial eclipse starts 21:30
			total eclipse starts 22:44
2007-03-16	20:00		Annual General Meeting
	CHO		
	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>
	CHO		
2007-05-04	20:00	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>
	CHO		
2007-05-05	10:00	various speakers	BAA Variable Star Section Meeting
	ROE		programme runs 10:30 to 17:30
2007-06-01	20:00	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>
	CHO		

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