

# The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh Journal

No 55 – March 2008

Web version at  
<http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org/publications/journals/55>

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*Comet 17P/Holmes on 2007-11-11, photographed with an  $f = 400$  mm  $f/6.3$  lens.  
This is a stack of four frames of 2 min exposure each, the field is about  $1.5^\circ$ .  
A stack of dark frames and a bilinear sky background have been subtracted,  
removing the sodium glare of the city. (Photograph by Horst Meyerdierks.)*

## Society news

Neil Grubb has donated a telescope to the Society. This is an f/10 Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope with 250 mm (10 inch) aperture and a computerised “goto” mount. The mount had a minor fault that Ken and Rachel Thomas managed to diagnose and repair. The scope got its first use at the December ordinary and Observing Group meetings, mostly to have a look at Mars. Council proposed and the December ordinary meeting confirmed to convey honorary membership of the Society on Neil.

On 2007-11-02 Andrew Elliot of the British Astronomical Association gave an entertaining talk about real-time video astronomy, with clips showing meteors, lunar occultations and other events. Lyn Smith, Director of the BAA Solar Section, gave the talk on 2007-12-07 demonstrating how the Sun can be of interest regardless of how much or little time you can spend observing it. This ranges from quick spot counts, through drawings in projection and through the eyepiece, to imaging the disc or prominences, in H $\alpha$  or CaK light. An entertaining account of the adventures of a telescope maker was given by John Braithwaite on 2008-01-11. Dr David Kerridge of the British Geological Survey gave the talk on 2008-02-01 about the Earth’s magnetic field, how BGS monitors its changes and whether the field is currently heading for a reversal of its polarity.

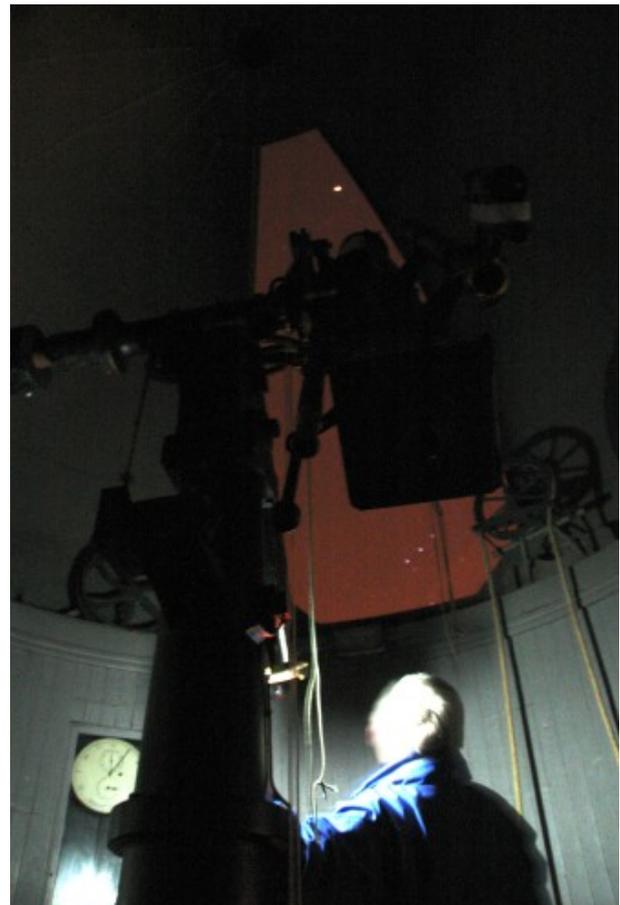
The Observing Group met on 2007-11-05, 2007-12-10, 2008-01-14 and 2008-02-04. At the December meeting the sky was clear and the 150 mm Cooke refractor and 250 mm Schmidt-Cassegrain were used. The latter was also useful to take tracked photographs with its piggyback camera mount. The target list included Mars – near opposition and at very high declination – and comet Holmes. At the January meeting the clouds teased the observers, but some practice in setting up and computer-controlling the 250 mm Schmidt-Cassegrain could be gained. Observers were also able to glimpse moon, Mars and Saturn at times. The February meeting was clear but strong winds sent observers upstairs to the dome of the 150 mm Cooke refractor, rather than set up the Schmidt-Cassegrain out in the open; Saturn, Mars and the Orion nebula were on the menu.

An additional meeting took place on 2007-12-21, the theme being one combining Mars and mince pies. The evening started with freezing haar and attendees concentrated on the mince pies and their liquid accom-

paniment. Later it cleared up and the Cooke refractor was pointed at Mars and the Moon, which was passing in front of the Pleiades at the time.

The main entrance to the observatory – and since March also much of Calton Hill looks like a building site. So far this is not the refurbishment/repair or renovation to the Observatory but rather the renovation work to the Astronomer’s House. But in early March there is very good news from the City Council, in that they will now replace the stolen lead on the roof with lead. (So far only an emergency repair with felt had been carried out.)

Frank Howie has had several pictures published in *Astronomy Now* during 2007, among them the cover picture of *ASE Journal 54*, which has also made it into the *Astronomy Now Yearbook*.



*Frank Howie took this picture looking past the Cooke refractor through the dome slit to Mars (top) and Orion’s Belt (bottom). This observing session took place after the ordinary meeting in January.*

## Astronomical Society of Edinburgh – Annual General Meeting

### Annual General Meeting Announcement

The Annual General Meeting of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh will be held at the City Observatory at 8pm on Friday 21st March 2008. The Agenda will be:

- Apologies
- Adoption of the Minutes of the AGM held on 16th March 2007
- Presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2007
- Election of Office Bearers and Council  
Nominations for the following have been received and as there are no more nominations than vacancies these members will be declared to have been elected:
  - President: Iain McEachran
  - Vice-Presidents:  
Daniel Gallacher, Kenneth Thomas
  - Secretary: Graham Rule
  - Treasurer: Alan Ellis
  - Councillors:  
Des Loughney, Horst Meyerdierks,  
David Small
 There are three vacancies on the Council and the newly elected Council will look to co-opt interested members.
- AOB

Please note that only members who have paid their subscription for the 2007-08 session are eligible to take part in this meeting.

*Graham Rule, Secretary*

### Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 16th March 2007

#### Opening

The meeting was opened by the President, Des Loughney, at 8:15pm.

Des circulated details about the BAA Variable Star Section Meeting to be held in May at the Royal Observatory.

#### Apologies

Apologies had been received from Horst Meyerdierks who was at the Association of Falkirk Astronomers' Glen Lyon weekend.

### Minutes of the AGM of 17th March 2006

These, having been circulated, were approved on a motion proposed by Iain McEachran and seconded by Alan Pickup.

#### Presentation of Annual Report and Accounts

The Annual Report and Accounts from the Council of the Society for the year 2006 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The Officers of the Society were available to speak to the formal report.

Alan Ellis outlined key financial matters in the report. Ray Fenouhlet suggested that we might benefit from taking out a Skipton Building Society Bond as that could provide a higher rate of interest than currently available with our Bank of Scotland Investment Account. He also noted that there was some £ 3000 available from the Trust's income.

Des noted that we could benefit from an increase in the number of members of the Society and urged members to encourage friends who had an interest in astronomy to join. Ken Thomas noted that the poor facilities at the Observatory made it difficult to make the site appear welcoming. He suggested that we should capitalise on astronomical events where we were able to invite visitors to the Observatory.

Alan noted that there were difficulties with getting donations from Radio Groups and the Beltane Society.

The meeting thanked Alan for the work he had done with the City in order to get the Rates Relief that has reduced the Society's expenditure.

Graham Rule reported on discussions with the City Council and the recently established "stakeholders' group". He noted that there were many good intentions in the City but that many of those who had to get work done were often woefully underfunded. Public pressure on the City to allocate more resources to the Observatory was needed and Professor John Brown (Astronomer Royal for Scotland and one of our Honorary Presidents) helped to raise our profile. There has been a consultation exercise regarding the use of the hill, with particular emphasis on the site as a public park, taking place recently. This has involved a small display at McDonald Road Library and there would be an event held in the Observatory itself between noon and 4pm tomorrow.

Graham also noted that next year's accounts will have a few differences because of a change in the regulations for Scottish Charities. He also noted that regulations were expected to be introduced which would allow Charities, such as the Society, to become incorporated bodies with limited liability under the Charities legislation (rather than the Companies Acts). Des said that he was a member of a society which was examining options for incorporation and that he would let us know how things went.

Des made four recommendations for the Society's Council to pursue in the next session:

- Open Nights – we should hold more of these and allow families to book slots so that they don't have to wait in a long queue. Such events should be well advertised in advance.
- Opposition of Mars in December – this is an opportunity for open days and an updated exhibition.
- Basic Astrophotography projects could be publicised by the Society. (Des has given some help to some Stevenson College students on this topic.) Graham suggested that such things could be written up in the Society's Journal and publicised on the website.
- Primary School teachers are encouraging pupils to do projects on astronomical topics. Des suggested that we could support such activities and maybe invite school pupils to give reports to our Society or to have members take part in after-school activities.

#### Election of Officers and Council for 2007-2008 session

There being no need for an election of Officers and Council those who had been nominated were declared elected.

- 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

Maurice Frank asked the meeting to note that he expected that all enquiries made to officers of the Society be treated with respect. Des agreed that this should be expected.

Ken Thomas suggested that Council Members should have badges so that newcomers and visitors would know who to speak to if they were interested in knowing more about the Society.

The Meeting thanked Alastair Mackie for the work he has done on the Council as he is stepping down.

#### AOB

There being no further business, the President was thanked for the work he has done in his two years in office, and the AGM was closed.

#### “Conjunction”



*Conjunction of Moon, antennae and con trail.  
By Frank Howie.*

## Astronomical Society of Edinburgh – Annual Report for 2007

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh is registered Scottish charity SC022968.

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 at the Annual General Meeting. The following served from 1st April:

- President: Iain McEachran FRAS  
38 Douglichill Place, Port Glasgow, PA14 5DH  
Telephone: 01475 713495  
Email: iain.mceachran@ntlworld.com
- Secretary: Graham Rule FRAS  
105/19 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1QG  
Telephone: 0131 667 0647  
Email: graham@grahamrule.net
- Treasurer: Alan Ellis FRAS  
10 Greenbank Gdns, Edinburgh, EH10 5SL  
Telephone: 0131 447 9968  
E-Mail: alan.ellis@blueyonder.co.uk
- Vice-Presidents:  
Daniel Gallacher, Kenneth Thomas
- Councillors:  
Maurice Frank, Des Loughney,

Pete MacDonald, David Small,  
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, Kenneth 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

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

### Membership

On the 31st December 2007 the membership of the Society was 73 of which 7 are honorary members.

### Honorary Members

Honorary members are Dr M. Brück, Dr H. Ford MBE, Dr D. Gavine, Dr N. Grubb, 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 52, 53 and 54 of the Society's Journal were published in 2007 under the editorship Horst Meyerdierts.

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](mailto:president@astronomyedinburgh.org)
- [secretary@astronomyedinburgh.org](mailto:secretary@astronomyedinburgh.org)
- [treasurer@astronomyedinburgh.org](mailto:treasurer@astronomyedinburgh.org)

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

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 2007:

January	5th	<b>Dr David Clarke</b> Glasgow University The Zodiacal Light
February	2nd	<b>Brian Kelly</b> – Dundee AS Its About Time
March	2nd	<b>Des Loughney</b> President, ASE Star Spots
	16th	<b>Annual General Meeting</b>
April	13th	<b>Prof Andy Lawrence</b> – ROE Cosmic Explorers: Mapping the Universe
May	4th	<b>Storm Dunlop</b> – BAA Optical Phenomena in the Atmosphere
	5th	<b>BAA Variable Star Section Meeting</b> held at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh
June	1st	<b>David Paterson</b> – Dundee AS Imagined Planets
July	6th	<b>Dr Suzanne Ramsay Howat</b> ROE A Selective History of Astronomy

August	3rd	<b>Members' Night</b> Short presentations by members of the Society
September	7th	<b>Prof Ian Robson</b> – UKATC Active Galaxies and Supermassive Black Holes <b>Robert McNaught</b> Siding Spring Survey Rob showed images of comets, in particular his bright one of early 2007
	29th	<b>Doors Open Day</b>
October	5th	<b>Dave Gavine</b> Past President, ASE Thomas Dick
	8th	Observing Group
November	2nd	<b>Andrew Elliott</b> – BAA Real time video astronomy
	5th	Observing Group
December	7th	<b>Lyn Smith</b> BAA Solar Section Director Observing the Sun in White Light and Hydrogen Alpha
	10th	Observing Group
	21st	Observing Evening Mars opposition and Moon in the Pleiades mince pies and mulled wine

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 12th January, 26th January, 23rd February, 30th March, 27th April, 28th September and 30th November.

## Observing

An arrangement has been made with a local organisation which allows our members use of a Dark Skies site. Members are being required to pay a deposit for keys to this site and we look forward to seeing the results of observing done there.

Dr Neil Grubb kindly donated a 10 inch Meade LX200 telescope to the Society. After a little bit of repair work this is now fully operational and has been used on a number of occasions at the Observatory. The Society expressed its thanks to Neil by electing him an Honorary Member of the Society.

The Cooke telescope has also been put to good use on meeting nights, observing nights and at other times with fine views of Mars and Saturn being seen.

## The Observatory

Last year we reported the restriction on the Society's activities imposed when part of the ceiling in the Playfair Building collapsed. Since then we have been assured that it is safe to continue to use the stairs and are now able to make full use of the Cooke telescope.

Some lead was stolen from the roof of the Playfair Building, the small Transit Building and the City Dome in February. This was patched up by City Council workmen on the day it occurred and it was hoped that a permanent repair would be done before the start of the winter.

Unfortunately we have to, once again, regret the absence of repairs to the Observatory. Despite an optimistic meeting with the Leader of the City Council, Cllr. Jenny Dawe, the City's financial situation would appear to mean that work will not be done until internal damage is clearly visible.

The Council welcome the restoration work being done on the Observatory House, the forthcoming pathwork repairs and signage that the City are providing but feel that a higher priority should be given to the Playfair Building to ensure that it continues to be available as a place where people can learn about astronomy and the telescope donated by Sir William McEwan over a hundred years ago.

The water supply to the site was not working for some months but this has since been fixed and there is once again a toilet available for use by members of the Society and our visitors.

Doors Open Day in September was a great success with thousands of visitors in the space of a few hours. We continue to open to the public from time to time and people wishing to arrange group visits are encouraged to contact the Secretary to discuss this.

Throughout the summer months the City's Parks Rangers ran weekly walking tours of the hill and,

when available, your Secretary opened the observatory to these tours. For many people from Edinburgh this was the first they had known that the observatory was still in use.

## 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
- Mr Jim Nisbet
- Mr Alan Pickup FRAS

All of the above trustees are members of the Society.

## Financial Report

The financial report for 2007 shows that we incurred a deficit of £ 1,884 on our income and expenditure statement. The main reasons for this are:

1. Reduced donations from radio groups due to the condition of the Cox Dome. Donations were £ 322 compared to £ 620 last year.
2. Subscription receipts are down to £ 777 compared to £ 1086 last year.
3. Meeting expenses are £ 730 compared to £ 300 last year.
4. Increased communications costs.
5. Lorimer Trust Income is currently being held in reserve by the ASE Trust where a better interest rate will be obtained. Around £ 4,800 in deferred payments due to the Society will be invested by the Trust.

It was considered useful to split the expenditure into costs associated with the Society and those directly relating to the Observatory and as can be seen this amounts to £ 1,714 and £ 1,497 respectively.

The form of presentation of this report conforms to the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1992,

## Statement of Balances for the year ended 31 December 2007

Bank Balances at 31 December 2006		
Current Account	£ 3,297.44	
Business Investment Account	£ 5,443.68	
<b>Total Balance</b>		<u>£ 8,741.12</u>
Less Liabilities for 2006	£ 17.50	Note 1
Plus Receipts for 2007	£ 1,327.64	
Less Payments for 2007	£ 3,212.01	
		<u>£ 6,839.25</u>

Bank Balances at 31 December 2007		
Current Account	£ 1,366.31	
Business Investment Account	£ 5,472.94	
<b>Total Balance</b>		<u>£ 6,839.25</u>

## Income and Expenditure Report for year ended 31 December 2007

**Income**

ASE Annual Subs	£ 777.00	Note 2
Dark Sky Site – Key Deposit	£ 20.00	Note 3
Donations	£ 322.00	Note 4
Gift Aid	£ 145.54	
Bank Interest	£ 63.10	Note 5
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>£ 1,327.64</u>	

**Expenditure**

Meeting Expenses	£ 730.27	Note 6
Travel Expenses	£ 25.75	Note 7
Library	£ 9.99	
Magazines & Subscription	£ 104.50	Note 8
Communications	£ 419.85	Note 9
Dark Sky Site	£ 140.00	Note 10
Equipment	£ 113.63	Note 11
Astrocalendars	£ 170.67	
<b>Total Society Expenditure</b>	<u>£ 1,714.66</u>	

Electricity	£ 479.79	
Phone	£ 216.90	
Insurance	£ 634.48	Note 12
Observatory sundries	£ 116.95	Note 13
Observatory repairs	£ 49.23	Note 14
<b>Total Observatory Expenditure</b>	<u>£ 1,497.35</u>	

**Total Expenditure** £ 3,212.01

**Income – Expenditure** –£ 1,884.37

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):  
£1,224.14  
This money was paid to Council members by the Treasurer on presentation of receipts for costs incurred on Society Business

### Note on Statement of Balances and Income and Expenditure Report

At the 31st December 2007 one cheque had not been cleared. This represents a liability for the Society of £57.00. Cheque number 011866 for £57.00 to Federation of Astronomical Societies membership fee for 2007/2008.

### General Notes:

1. The 2006 Liability of £17.50 represents cheque payments made during 2006 but not cleared until 2007.
2. Annual subscriptions are still due for 2007/2008 from a significant number of members. It is

3. Dark Sky key deposits received from two members.
4. Donations of £200 from Radio Ramadan for use of the Observatory premises for radio broadcast plus content of the Playfair Building donations box £122.
5. Interest from Current account £33.84 and Investment account £29.26.
6. Meeting expenses – Speakers' Hospitality £505 and Travel £155 and Refreshments.
7. Additional travel on Society Business.
8. Magazines £94.50 and SAG subscription £10.
9. Journal production (new toner cartridges, previous inkjet cartridge costs and postage). Also Astrocalendars and other letters. Also Internet Domain name registration renewal (2 years).
10. Dark Sky site annual rent (£120) plus four keys (£20).
11. President's Medal inscription plate and presentation box replacement (£95) and DVD player for lecture hall (£18).
12. Insurance – General Contents £6,498 and specified items of individual equipment ranging from £1,695 to £3,264. Also included is £5 million public liability insurance.
13. Observatory Sundries – Exterior lighting and additional keys.
14. Blocked drain repair.

This report was approved at a meeting of the Council of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh held at the City Observatory on 29 February 2008.

*Graham Rule, Secretary  
For and on behalf of the Council of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh*

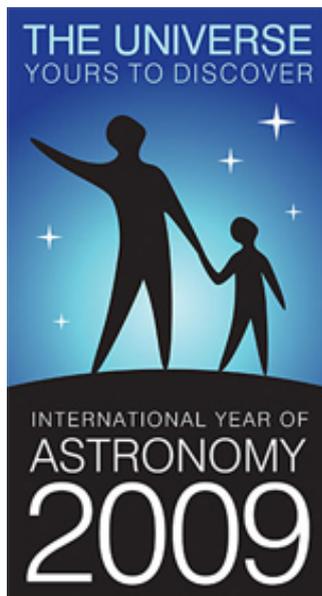
### Report by the Independent Examiner

I have examined the Annual Report, the Society's accounting records, and the above Receipts and Payments Account and Statement of Balances. To the best of my knowledge and belief, and in accordance with the information and explanations given to me:

1. The association is eligible under section 7(1) of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1992 to choose to have an independent examination, instead of an audit. I therefore do not express an opinion on the view given by the accounts.
2. The Receipts and Payments Account and Statement of Balances have been prepared from the records of the Society and are in agreement with them.
3. The Receipts and Payments Account and Statement of Balances comply with the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 1992 and with the Society's constitution.

*David Thomson, 7th March 2008*

## UN declares Year of Astronomy



The United Nations 62nd General Assembly has proclaimed 2009 the International Year of Astronomy. The Resolution was submitted by Italy, Galileo Galilei's home country. The International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) is an initiative of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) and UNESCO. [1]

scientific knowledge can contribute to a more equitable and peaceful society. [1]

The UK coordinator of IYA2009 is Prof. Ian Robson, Director of Edinburgh's UK Astronomy Technology Centre and President of IAU Commission 55 – Communicating Astronomy with the Public. It is expected that there will be two National Astronomy Weeks, in March/April with good views of the Moon and Saturn, and in late October with good views of the Moon, Jupiter and its Galilean moons – 2009 is the 400th anniversary of Galileo's first use of a telescope. In addition, Moonweek will be toward the end of July, the 40th anniversary of the Apollo Moon landings. [2]

The vision of the IYA2009 is to help the citizens of the world rediscover their place in the Universe through the day and night time sky – and thereby engage a personal sense of wonder and discovery. All humans should realize the impact of astronomy and basic sciences on our daily lives, and understand better how

### References

1. IYA2009 Secretariat, 2007, press release, <http://www.astronomy2009.org/content/view/344/46/>
2. Ian Robson, 2007-2008, IYA2009 UK web site, <http://www.astronomy2009.co.uk>

*Horst Meyerdirks*

## Scottish Astronomers Group – reincarnated

The Annual General Meeting of the Scottish Astronomers Group was held 2008-02-23 – in parallel with the Society for Popular Astronomy weekend hosted by Stirling Astronomical Society. At the SAG AGM the President Bill Ward resigned, and was thanked by the assembled members for his services. Bill had circulated by email a motion for the AGM to decide on. The motion states that

The Scottish Astronomers Group be reconstituted as an occasional observers group without official positions and no financial, or other, liabilities. Participation is at the individuals' own risk. [1]

Bill argues his case for this motion:

I have always maintained that the SAG is a forum for the active astronomers and observers across Scotland, that is an informal trans-society observers group.

What has happened over the last ten years plus, is that it has grown into a de-facto society in its own right. This no longer seems to be a viable position as it was never conceived as an "umbrella" organisation and receives little input as such. As evidence for this there are fewer and fewer contributors and fewer and fewer "members". At one point there were 120+! Now there are just a handful private supporters and a few affiliated Societies. [1]

At the AGM Dave Gavine testified to the fact that SAG was originally simply a forum for informal and irregular meetings to prepare observing sessions, etc. These meetings would have particular topics, would be chaired by a chairperson for the day, and at the end of the day participants settled the financial aspects of holding the meeting. Dave agreed that from the mid 1980s SAG began to turn into a much more

formal body with officers, accounts, and regular meetings with invited speakers.

Bill's motion was carried unanimously. The first consequence is that no membership subscriptions will be collected from societies or individual members. In fact, subscriptions sent in for the new session are being returned. While the currently held funds last, Iain McEachran will continue to produce the SAG Magazine, so *do* send him material to publish. The second consequence will be that the cycle of three meetings per year has come to an end. Any meetings will be irregular, informal and with specific subjects, as was the case with SAG 40 years ago.

What is different from 40 years ago is that SAG offers

its "members" – those interested in promoting or participating in amateur astronomical observing in Scotland – a web-based discussion forum [2] as a means of communication. The forum is open for anonymous read, and readers can sign up in self-service to join the discussions.

## References

1. Bill Ward, 2008, email to secretaries of affiliated societies, approx. 2008-02-17
2. Scottish Astronomers Group, 2007-2008, <http://sagforum.proboards79.com>

*Horst Meyerdierks*

## UK astronomy in funding crisis

Money is the root of all evil! Or so the saying goes! As far as astronomy in the UK is concerned, the saying is very true!

So many astronomical facilities and research will be cancelled due to a shortfall of £80 million in the budget the government allocates to the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

The STFC came about from the merger of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) and the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC). To a lot of people they are the 'bad boys on the block', but before the merger the William Herschel telescope and the UKIRT in Hawaii were already going to be cancelled!

So what does this mean for astronomy in the UK?

- Gemini South Telescope has been cancelled!
- WHT in La Palma has been cancelled!
- Ground based Solar & terrestrial physics has been cancelled!
- ESA Support for post-launch missions\*) has been cut by 30 %!
- UKIRT in Hawaii is under threat!
- Merlin Radio Interferometer is under threat!
- University funding for research is to be cut by 25 %!

\*) ESA's work on ExoMars, Herschel, Gaia & Bepi-Colombo is safe.

A pretty dismal time ahead for astronomy in the UK

is forecast – in a time when astronomy was gearing up for 2009 – the International Year of Astronomy – a full year of promoting astronomy to the person in the street and encouraging youngsters to take an interest in the science. "If the planned cuts go ahead, astronomy research in the UK may never recover" said the President of the Royal Astronomical Society, Professor Michael Rowan-Robinson.

So what does this leave us?

- ALMA (Atacama Large Millimetre/Submillimetre Array) is safe
- Very Large Telescope is safe

What can be done, if anything?

A petition was available to be signed at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Physics-Funding/>, and it was signed by 17,525 people. This petition was on Downing Street's website and had a closing date of 18th February. Another site to check out is <http://www.saveastronomy.co.uk>.

*Iain McEachran*

*This item is adapted from Iain's editorial in February's Scottish Astronomers Group Magazine. A good web resource to stay up to date on this issue is Paul Crowther's "STFC funding crisis: astronomy" at <http://pacrowther.staff.shef.ac.uk/stfc.html>*

## John Christopher Bartholomew, MA. FRSGS. FRSE.

We regret to inform members of the passing of one of our longest-serving and most illustrious members, John Bartholomew, on January 16, at the age of 85. He was born in Edinburgh on January 15 1923, attended St Trinnean's School then Edinburgh Academy and Gordonstoun where he was a contemporary of Prince Philip. He graduated with honours in Geography at Edinburgh in 1951 then served an apprenticeship in Cartography in the family firm.

John and his two brothers were the 5th generation and last members of the dynasty to run the cartographic business Bartholomew and Sons, which had been active for about 175 years and had a world-wide reputation. It was bought by Reader's Digest in 1980. Among the many achievements of the firm were the famous half-inch scale maps for cyclists and ramblers, the *Times Atlas of the World* and the *Times Atlas of the Moon*. The many activities of the firm and of John, its Director, are given in the lengthy obituary in *The*

*Times* of February 1st. He travelled widely in 5 continents, served as a cartographic officer with the Royal Engineers during the war, was Honorary President of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, and President of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society 1987-93. He was elected to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1964.

He donated funds for the placing of an indicator on North Berwick Law, another on the Braid Hills, and for restoring the sundial in the Hermitage of Braid. Before he became too frail he regularly attended our meetings, went to the Scottish Astronomy Weekends, and often reported sightings of Noctilucent Clouds from the Braids.

John leaves a widow, Ginette, 5 sons and 11 grandchildren. The Society extends its sympathy to them.

Dave Gavine

## Book review: The lost language of the stars

Heather Connie Martin, 2007, *The lost language of the stars*, Virevolte, France, ISBN 978-2-9530732-0-1, paperback, A4 format, 80 pages, 77 black and white illustrations, £ 10.50, € 15.00.

This is a star atlas with a difference. Martin believes that the symbols found on pre-Christian Pictish stones correspond to constellations that the Picts would have seen in the sky.

The introduction briefly tells the story of the author, growing up in Dundee and influenced both by amateur astronomy and by the Pictish stones that are still dotting the landscape. We are reminded that ancient peoples would have seen the stars and would have constructed patterns, but that the Pictish constellations would have little relation to the Babylonian or Greek ones that have survived to the present day. The main part of the book is formed by five sections introducing the proposed constellations, those visible in winter, spring, autumn and summer, and finally those that are circumpolar. Each constellation is shown side by side as outline of a stone carving and as a map of stars with connecting lines for guidance. This is accompa-

nied by some background information about the ancient myths, Pictish and otherwise. In the final chapter Martin provides some historical context, beginning with brochs (iron age round towers) and the proposal that these might have served to observe stars in the zenith. She closes with a mention of minor planet (3753) Cruithne, discovered in 1986 by Duncan Waldron, and named after the legendary first king of the Picts.

The limiting magnitude of the star charts is about 7. Sometimes only one star in the charts is named, leaving the orientation slightly ambiguous. The star symbol sizes are sometimes slightly at odds with the catalogued magnitudes of the stars. The reviewer had mixed success finding the constellations, but then he does not see elaborate figures in our Greek constellations either, and skies within travelling distance of the city are not nearly as dark as in Pictish times. Some bright constellations from the book are easy to make out, some others – though fainter – can help making sense of sky areas with few bright stars.

Horst Meyerdirks

## Recent observations

### Comets

As reported at the last minute in *ASE Journal* **54**, comet 17P/Holmes surprised astronomers with an outburst in late October that boosted its brightness 500,000-fold above expectations. It was brighter than 3 mag compared to the predicted 17 mag. Horst Meyer-dierks followed it from late October until the end of December, measuring coma diameter and brightness in dSLR images.

Horst also imaged 8P/Tuttle on three occasions in late December and early January. This comet behaved more to the predictions, being just brighter than 7 mag. It was moving rather quicker than Holmes from Cassiopeia past M33 and into Pisces.

### Sun

Horst takes an image of the Sun whenever possible and averages his spot counts in 30-day intervals. He reports the following R numbers (number of spots plus ten times the number of spot groups):

2006-12-11 / -01-09	14.9
2007-01-10 / -02-08	20.8
-02-09 / -03-10	5.8
-03-11 / -04-09	2.2
-04-10 / -05-09	4.2
-05-10 / -06-08	15.7
-06-09 / -07/08	9.9
-07-09 / -08/07	8.9
-08-08 / -09/06	6.9

-09-07 / -10/06	2.3
-10-07 / -11-05	1.1
-11-06 / -12-05	4.4
2007-12-06 / -01-04	5.0
2008-01-05 / -02-03	3.1

Early in 2007 it appeared that the minimum of sunspot activity might have occurred in March, but after a more active summer October turned out even lower spot counts.

### Variables

Horst observed the minimum on 2007-10-23 of the eclipsing binary RZ Cas. He measured the brightness in dSLR images taken at 15 min intervals. Each image was a tracked single frame of 20 s exposure taken with a 400 mm f/6.3 (63 mm aperture) lens. RZ Cas has an amplitude of 1.4 or 1.5 mag and the data have an accuracy of 0.04 mag.

Des Loughney in January observed the eclipsing binary VW Cep with an amplitude of only 0.4 mag. His data are also accurate to 0.04 mag. But Des used a stationary dSLR with 200 mm f/3.5 (57 mm aperture) lens and averaged 10 frames of 2.5 s exposure.

### Lunar halo

The lunar halo of Christmas Eve was seen by various observers in the Central Belt, certainly from Edinburgh to Falkirk and Stirling. Frank Howie made the picture shown here.



*A light mist made this lunar halo even more beautiful on a cold, Christmas Eve, 2007. Mist reduced the contrast of the overall scene, clearly revealing discernible colour tinges in the halo – like a faint, 360° softly coloured rainbow. An extra bonus was the presence of Mars within the halo at the 2 o'clock position. All this beauty, despite the bright sodium street lights in the immediate vicinity of the observing site (Morningside, Edinburgh). Photograph and caption by Frank Howie.*

## Forthcoming events

- 2008-03-07 Prof Andrew Collier Cameron  
20:00 St. Andrews University  
**The search for extra solar planets**
- 2008-03-10 Observing group  
20:00
- 2008-03-21 **Annual General Meeting**  
20:00
- 2008-04-04 Russell Eberst  
20:00 ASE  
**Satellite tracking and other things**
- 2008-04-07 Observing group  
20:00
- 2008-05-02 Ken Kennedy  
20:00 Dundee AS  
**The lunar maria**
- 2008-05-05 Observing group  
20:00
- 2008-06-06 *speaker TBD*  
20:00 **Title TBD**
- 2008-06-09 Observing group  
20:00

Our meetings are open to the public (unless otherwise stated). We are always happy to see new faces. Ordinary meetings take place at 20:00 (Civil Time) in the City Dome of the City Observatory, Calton Hill (usually on the first Friday of the month). On the following Monday evening we hold Observing Group meetings starting at 20:00. If the weather is poor then we may leave after an hour but given good weather we hope to be there until 22:00 at least. Any changes to our meeting arrangements will be put on our website <http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org>

## Asteroid "Harryford" 6907

Robert McNaught discovered this (and many others) with the UK Schmidt at Siding Spring in Australia in November 1990, and has had it named after his old mentor, Dr. Harry Ford, MBE, one of our honorary members and Lorimer Medallist.

Harry has spent a lifetime promoting astronomy, especially to young people, as Curator of the Mills Observatory Dundee, then as Planetarium Lecturer at the old Royal Observatory, Greenwich. He was one of the founders of Dundee Astronomical Society in 1956 and was for a short time Director of the BAA Lunar Section.

*Dave Gavine*

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## About the ASE Journal

This Journal is published by

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh  
City Observatory  
Calton Hill, Edinburgh  
<http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org>

The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh is registered Scottish charity SC022968.

This Journal appears approximately four times a year, usually in March, June, September and December.

Contributions should be sent to the editor by the beginning of the month preceding publication. Contributions are welcome from members of the Society, or regarding astronomy in Edinburgh or Scotland.

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