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The Playfair Building on Calton Hill a few years ago. The 150 mm Cooke refractor in the dome and the 250 mm Schmidt-Cassegrain – outdoors just right of centre – are both in use. The star above the dome is Deneb.

Photograph by Rachel Thomas.

Society news

Closure of the City Observatory

Following the formal closure of the City Observatory by the Society in January, it was vital to vacate the premises before the new council tax (and business rates) year began. During February and March, from weekend to weekend the hours put in by members grew, the task being to move things first from the Playfair Building to the City Dome, then into boxes, and finally into storage, recycling or waste disposal. Thanks are due more than a dozen members for getting this done.

Our books occupy a significant fraction of the hired storage space. Iain McEachran and Danny Gallacher have been busy researching the value of each book. We will probably keep the most valuable items as investment. Less valuable items will probably be sold to reduce the volume of stored books and at the same time to contribute to the cost of storage.

Meetings and Council

At most Ordinary Meetings Alan Pickup gives a presentation about the sky in the forthcoming month, usually including snippets of recent news in the fields of observational astronomy and spaceflight.

Following the Annual General Meeting on 2009-03-13, Angus Self gave a most interesting presentation not only about, but also with meteorites. On 2009-04-03, we watched an official movie for the International Year of Astronomy – Eyes on the Skies. The presenter in the movie is Jochen Liske, who was a member of the Society when he worked in Edinburgh. On 2009-05-01, Andy Taylor of the Royal Observatory Edinburgh gave an engaging talk about dark matter, dark energy and cosmology. On 2009-06-05 John Davies – always good for an entertaining talk – spoke on runaway rockets and other disasters in space exploration.

The Annual General Meeting elected the following Council of the Society, which took office on 2009-04-01:

- President: Horst Meyerdierks
- Vice-Presidents: Iain McEachran, Rachel Thomas
- Secretary: Graham Rule
- Treasurer: Alan Ellis
- Councillors: Daniel Gallacher, Frank Howie, Peter Mulholland, David Small, Kenneth Thomas

The meeting passed by acclamation a vote of thanks to Iain McEachran as outgoing President. The AGM being held on Red Nose Day, David Small and Rachel Thomas did “something funny for money” and raised £45 for Comic Relief. At its first meeting, on 2009-04-03, the new Council co-opted Vincent Balfour into the remaining vacancy of Councillor.

International Year of Astronomy etc.

A Scottish launch of the International Year of Astronomy was held on 2009-02-25 at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh. Horst Meyerdierks represented the Society at this meeting of scientists, amateur astronomers, teachers and outdoor educators.

The International Year of Astronomy spring Moon watch week was 2009-03-28 to -04-05, and Ken Thomas initiated our own six-night Moon watch on Calton Hill, with a few others joining in and bringing their telescopes. The first three nights were from the Observatory proper, but from then on – having handed



Ready for the public – Moon watch on Calton Hill, outside the City Observatory. Photograph by Horst Meyerdierks.

back the keys – we had to make do with the car park and paths. 2009-03-30 itself doubled up as a farewell gathering of members and friends of the Society. The Saturday, 2009-03-28, saw Earth Hour, when much of the building illumination in the City was switched off for an hour. However, street lighting remained on and the effect on the sky brightness was probably minor.

Following last November’s Moon watch at the Seabird Centre in North Berwick, we returned to take part in a 3-day festival “John Muir Odyssey”, focussing on environment and outdoor pursuits and part of the Homecoming Scotland events. David Small again took the lead in this effort, but thanks go to all who put in a presence. We made good use of our H α telescope, but in the absence of sunspots and prominences the

best views were of Venus in the day sky through our 114 mm Newtonian and Ken Thomas' 200 mm Schmidt-Cassegrain.

Neil Bone

Sadly, Neil Bone died in April after a long battle with cancer, aged only 49. Born in Cambeltown, during his stay in Edinburgh, Neil was a member of the Society and during the 1980s and early 1990s a frequent contributor to the *Journal*. He was on the Council of the Society and Vice President in 1985 and 1986, until employment drew him south. Having built up the Northern Network of the BAA Meteor Section, he went on to become Directory of the entire Section in 1992. He was a columnist for both the *Journal of the BAA* and *Astronomy Now*. He has written a number of books on amateur astronomy. Neil had only recently had an asteroid – (7102) Neilbone – named after him.

A letter to the Journal of the BAA The City Observatory, Calton Hill, Edinburgh

The City Observatory is a historic complex of buildings. The original Observatory House to the southwest of the site was begun by Thomas Short, telescope maker, in 1776 and completed in 1792 to a design by James Craig with advice from Robert Adam. This building, after lying derelict for some time, is currently being refurbished.

The City Observatory, designed by William Playfair and completed in 1818, housed the Astronomical Institution founded by Prof. John Playfair as President in 1812. A principal objective of the Observatory was to give accurate time for the City, and for ships at the Port of Leith. In 1895, the smoke from railway engines forced the Astronomer Royal to transfer his work to the nearby Blackford Hill Observatory.

In recent times, the City Observatory has been the meeting place of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh. The deteriorating state of the buildings has been a cause for concern for some years. There is dry rot, plaster falls, thieves have stripped lead from the roof and the toilets have been vandalised. In consequence, the ASE, which has a lease of the building from the City Council, has decided to withdraw from the Observatory and meet elsewhere.



This watercolour of the City Observatory by Ron Livesey was on display in the City Dome until the Society moved out in March 2009.

There has been a long and protracted discussion with the City Fathers regarding the state of the Observatory. I once wrote to the then Lord Provost myself. It all revolves around the development of the whole of Calton Hill, which schemes are adopted and who pays. The Council, Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund are all involved.

In total contrast the Mills Observatory on Balgay Hill, Dundee, meeting place of the Astronomical Society of Dundee, is a thriving institution. It has been refurbished by the City Council and staffed to make it accessible to the public for talks, observing sessions and school parties.

It is a sad day when a capital city's historic observatory is allowed to suffer years of neglect, while that of another city is fulfilling its *raison d'être* and showing what can be done.

Ron Livesey

This letter appeared in the April 2009 issue of the Journal of the BAA. It is reproduced here with Ron's permission.

A grand event to celebrate the International Year of Astronomy

Everyone interested in astronomy knows that 2009 is the International Year of Astronomy, to celebrate 400 years since Galileo Galilei first used a small telescope to begin unravelling the mysteries of the universe. Many events have been run, and are still to run, all around the globe to mark this milestone in astronomical history. This is the story of one of them.

Beginnings

Mathers Bar, Broughton Road, early October 2008.

Hi Lorna.

Hi Charlie. Guinness and a G&T please.

How's the OU course going?

Never mind that, how do you feel about us organising a day of astro talks for the IYA with top professional people like Brian Cox and Chris Lintott, and well known amateurs too, say Tom Boles and Dave Gavine?

(I try to change the subject)

And we could run a ceilidh in the evening, where everyone would mix, and dance and talk astronomy?

(I try to change the subject again).

And imagine a centrepiece, suspended from the ceiling of the hall - a huge rotating model of Jupiter complete with Great Red Spot and cloud bands?

(I definitely try to change the subject again).

Great plan Lorna. Best have another G&T and a Guinness (or three). How was the biology course?

I found it hard going, but really interesting too.

(Yippee!, managed to change the subject!)

Anyway, we could even have a telescope outside so that members of the public could have a look at Saturn.

(Right, Plan A hasn't worked, better revert to Plan B – play along and smile benignly).

Ok, Lorna, let's think about it over the weekend, and then get in touch. (That'll be right.)



Philip Perkins with one of his stunning photographs.

So the seeds of the idea were sown. We realised very quickly that such a plan was going to cost money. There would be speakers' costs and a venue to hire at least. We would need sponsorship, but as two members of the public with an idea, who would pay any heed?

Liftoff

I realised that we needed to pull someone in who had some clout, so I suggested to Lorna that she approach John Brown. I knew she knows him quite well, and thought he might lend his name to any sponsorship application we might make. With hindsight, this was akin to lighting the blue touch paper. John took to the idea with unbounded enthusiasm, and drove it forward with a pace that took our breath away. Within a few short weeks, he had secured a significant grant from the Institute of Physics to cover the costs of speakers and a venue, and had agreement in principle from several prominent professional astronomers including Chris Lintott and Francisco Diego to present talks at the event. In the meantime, Lorna had purchased a 3-metre diameter weather balloon, and had Malcolm, a friend's son, organised to paint it to look like Jupiter, and with her contacts in the folk music scene, had booked a top ceilidh band "The Occasionals" for the evening session. We had also booked the Debating Hall within the Edinburgh University Student Union for both events, and

this has an open balcony attached to the bar where we could use a small telescope for the evening viewing, skies permitting. Very quickly, seemingly deranged ramblings were becoming reality.

The day arrives

Saturday 18th April 2009 dawned an overcast, grey but dry day. We hurried up to the Debating Hall, concerned that Jupiter had lost most of it's mass, and resembled a shrivelled melon more than a gas giant. In the foyer, the display of nine astro photos kindly donated by three of the best amateur astrophotographers on the planet, Rob Gendler, Russ Croman and Phil Perkins, looked stunning in the morning light. Jupiter was a fantastic sight, gently silently rotating. We quickly set up for the first talk, and the day was up and running.



The meeting hall, Prof John Brown opening the event.

10:00-10:25 John Brown
Introduction

10:25-10:50 Bill Sampson
Public Astronomy in Scotland

10:50-11:15 Pauline McCrae
The Dark Skies Scotland Project

11:15-11:40 Dave Gavine
Variable Star Observing

11:40-12:05 Charlie Gleed
Robotic Telescopes for All

12:05-12:30 Philip Perkins
Imaging the Cosmos

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:00 Chris Lintott
400 Years of Unveiling the Cosmos

Chris was the main speaker, and almost doubled the number of attendees for the afternoon session. He had a return train journey booked for 17:30, but the lure of the ceilidh was too much, and he stayed on until midnight, getting to bed about 1am. He was up again at 4:30am for a taxi to the airport to catch the first flight to London, to attend a Sky at Night shoot later on in the day. He particularly enjoyed the combination of daytime talks and evening ceilidh, and commented "You're definitely on to something here!" Many agreed wholeheartedly with that sentiment.

15:00-15:30 John Braithwaite *Making, Buying and Using Small Telescopes*

15:30-16:00 Francisco Diego *Fire in the Sky*

16:00-16:30 Tom Boles *Supernova Hunting and Cosmology*

16:30-17:00 Helen Fraser *How to Hunt for Life in the Universe*

17:00-17:30 John Brown *Closing Remarks*

As if by higher order (surely JB had no part in this?), at 6pm the clouds melted away and a clear sky appeared for the rest of the night.

No time to lose, a quick trip home, and back for the ceilidh. Great band, great dance caller, great turnout, great fun had by all. Almost 90 people looked through a telescope for the very first time. What a night.

Moral

If you don't want to have a beer (or three) with some seemingly quite mad person on an autumn evening and you'd prefer to avoid getting tangled up with a crazed plan which will take up vast amounts of your time, cause panic and disruption in your otherwise ordered life and leave you with a wonderful feeling of enjoyment, achievement and fulfilment, then steer clear of Mathers on a Friday night, and whatever you do, don't let the Astronomer Royal for Scotland get wind of it.



Ceilidh.

One or two people said to us at the end of the evening, “What a great event, let’s do it again in another 400 years!” I have a sneaking feeling it may be somewhat sooner than that.

Thanks

The three organisers – Lorna McCalman, John Brown and Charlie Gleed – wish to acknowledge that there were many individuals and organisations without whose assistance this event would not have run so smoothly, or perhaps at all. In particular, the Institute of Physics and the Royal Society of Edinburgh for grant funding. ROE (Tania Johnston) and IoP (Alison McClure) for the loan of poster boards for the display. Ian McCalman for providing and running the sound system. Douglas McCalman for the ceilidh posters and entry stickers. Graham Rule for supervising PC changeover and troubleshooting between talks. Malcolm Cruikshank for painting, and knowledge of inflation theory.

Photos by Lorna McCalman.

Charlie Gleed

Forthcoming events

| | | |
|------------|-------|--|
| 2009-07-03 | 20:00 | Dr Rachel Gilmour, European Southern Observatory |
| | AUC | A night in the life of the Very Large Telescope |
| 2009-10-02 | 20:00 | Dr Lyndsay Fletcher, University of Glasgow |
| | AUC | TBD |
| 2009-11-06 | 20:00 | TBD |
| | AUC | TBD |

AUC:

Augustine Church Centre,
41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL.

PLDS:

Dark Site near Pearie Law, 4 km south of West Calder,
NT 003 579, $\lambda = -3^{\circ}35'28''$, $\phi = +55^{\circ}48'17''$.

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), usually in the Augustine Church Centre on the first Friday of the month. Any changes to our meeting arrangements will be put on our website <http://www.astronomyedinburgh.org>

Obituary: Mary Brück

It is with very great regret that we report the death of astronomer, eminent historian of astronomy and ASE Honorary Member Dr Mary Brück on 11 December 2008 at the age of eighty-three after a short illness. Dr Brück had a long association with the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh and will be well known to many members.

Máire Teresa Brück née Conway (she often used the anglicised form of her first name outside Ireland) was born on 29 May 1925 in Ballivor, Co. Meath in the Irish Republic. She was the daughter of Thomas and Margaret Conway, the oldest of their eight children. She attended St Louis Convent in Monaghan. From school she attended University College Dublin where she studied physics. Af-



*Máire (Mary) Teresa Brück (1925-2008).
(Photograph courtesy Andrew Brück.)*

ter graduating, she pursued doctoral research in solar physics at the University of Edinburgh, where normal academic life was resuming after the war. This work resulted in the thesis *Studies of H α Line Profiles in Prominences*, for which a PhD was awarded in 1950.

Following the award of her doctorate Mary Conway, as she then was, took up an appointment at the Dunsink Observatory, Dublin, where she continued her solar work. While at Dunsink she met her future husband, Prof. Hermann Alexander Brück, then Director of the Observatory, and they married in 1951.

While at Dunsink Mary Brück made her first foray into popular astronomy, broadcasting a series of radio programmes for children, *The Sun, Moon and Stars*, on Radio Éireann (now Radio Telefís Éireann) in the mid-1950s. These broadcasts were the first popular astronomy programmes in Ireland and found a receptive audience. In the early 1960s, she broadcast a second series on the then-new topic of *Spaceflight*.

In 1957, Prof. Brück was appointed Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Regius Professor of Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh and Director of the Royal Observatory Edinburgh (ROE), posts that he held until his retirement in 1975. His family relocated to Scotland with him, moving into the purpose-built residence for the Astronomer Royal in the grounds of the ROE on Blackford Hill. They were the last Director's family to live "on the hill"; subsequent to Prof. Brück's retirement all the residential accommodation was converted to offices.



During 1954, the Dunsink Observatory mounted an expedition to observe the eclipse of 30 June from the island of Öland in Sweden. Mary Brück is captured here adjusting equipment during that expedition. On the day, heavy clouds prevented any observations from being made, a familiar frustration for eclipse-watchers. (Photograph reproduced courtesy the ROE.)

Although she now had three children of her own as well as two stepchildren, Mary Brück continued to pursue an academic career. In 1962, she was appointed a part-time lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, later becoming full-time and retiring as a Senior Lecturer in 1984. From 1984 to 1987, she was a Fellow of the University and more recently an Honorary Fellow. Throughout her time at Edinburgh Mary Brück was heavily involved in undergraduate teaching, for which she will be fondly remembered by generations of students. During this period she switched from solar to stellar research, pursuing a programme of three-colour photometry, initially largely of southern galactic clusters and later becoming an expert in the Magellanic Clouds.

After retiring in 1975 Prof. Brück, took up the study of the history of astronomy. Initially Mary Brück collaborated in this

work, but she was to become an eminent and respected historian of astronomy in her own right. The collaboration led to *The Peripatetic Astronomer* (1988), the definitive biography of Piazzi Smyth, the second Astronomer Royal for Scotland. In later years, Prof. Brück's health declined and Mary Brück looked after him through his

final years until his death in 2000.

Mary Brück's own particular interest was women in astronomy and much of her work subsequent to *The Peripatetic Astronomer* was in this area. She wrote *Agnes Mary Clerke and the Rise of Astrophysics* (2002), a masterly piece of work that is likely to remain the definitive study of its subject. Her final book, *Women in Early British and Irish Astronomy*, a collection of biographical essays on various women astronomers, is to be published posthumously later in 2009. She also published numerous papers and book reviews and contributed entries for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. She never lost sight of her Irish roots, writing two chapters for *Stars, Shells and Bluebells* (1997) published under the auspices of the Irish WITS (Women into Technology and Science) initiative and celebrating the achievements of early women pioneers of science in that country. Its forthcoming companion volume, *Lab Coats and Lace*, to which she also contributed, is dedicated to her memory.

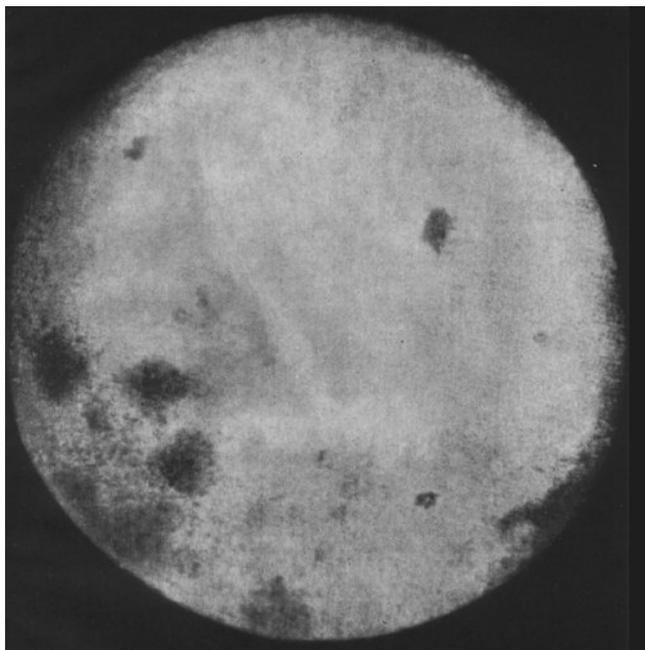
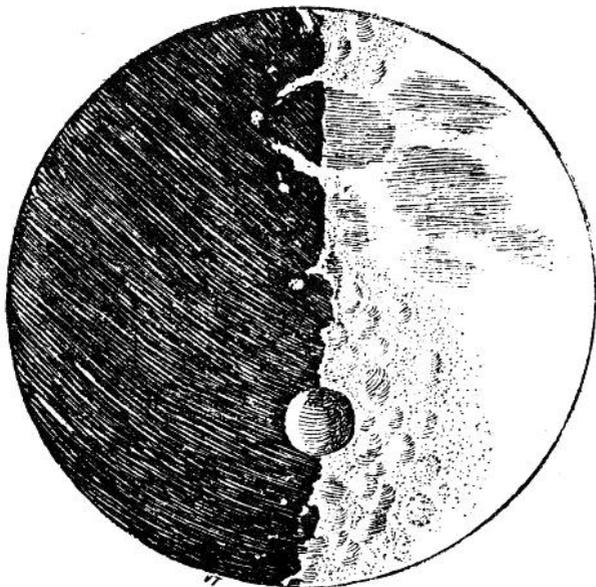
Following tradition, Prof. Brück was Honorary President of the ASE from 1957 to 1975. Both he and Mary Brück were elected Honorary Members in 1992. Mary Brück regularly contributed to the talk programme during the 1990s, mostly speaking on historical topics. She also contributed an article to the *Journal*. In 2001, the Society awarded her its Lorimer Medal for her work in popularising astronomy.

Mary Brück was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS, <http://www.ras.org.uk>), an Honorary Member of the Irish Astronomical Society (<http://www.irishastrosoc.org>) and a Member (and valued supporter) of the Society for the History of Astronomy (<http://www.freewebs.com/sochistastro/>). The ROE held a short workshop in her honour on the occasion of her eightieth birthday in 2005.

She remained active until shortly before the end, regularly attending meetings and giving talks. In 2002, despite being almost immobile following a hip operation, she was determined to honour an invitation as the guest speaker at the Scottish Astronomy Weekend in Dundee and gave an acclaimed talk on *Spectra of the Stars*. As recently as May 2008, she gave a well-received public lecture to the RAS in London on *The Fascination of the Heavens* about pioneering women astronomers. In addition to *Women in Early British and Irish Astronomy*, she also had a paper in press in *The Antiquarian Astronomer*. Co-written with ASE stalwart David Gavine, it documents the Revd Hector MacPherson, a populariser of astronomy in early twentieth century Edinburgh.

In her youth, Mary Brück imbibed the deep Catholic faith of her parents and it sustained and underpinned her throughout her life. Always modest and self-effacing, she was unfailingly generous and helpful to colleagues and students alike. She will be greatly missed by her many friends, not least in this Society. She is survived by her children Anne, Catherine and Andrew and her stepchildren Mary and Peter.

Clive Davenhall



The international month of the Moon?

The two historical anchors of the International Year of Astronomy both relate to the Moon and the month of July.

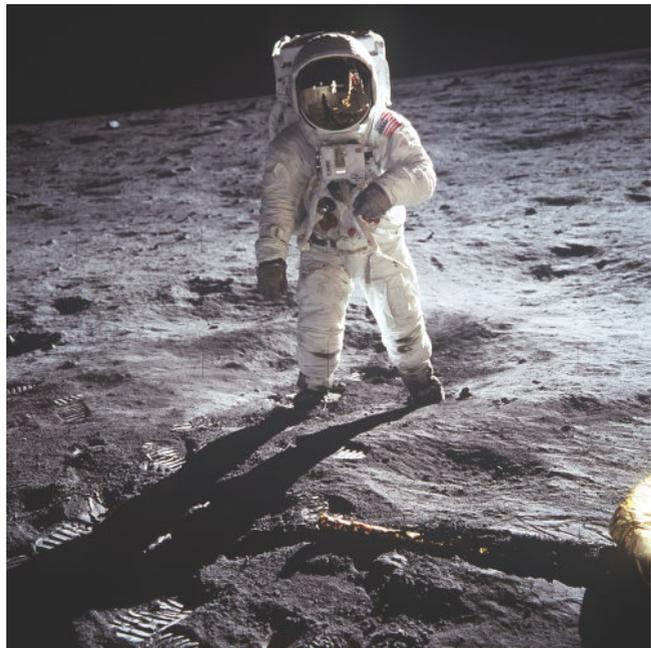
400 years ago, on 1609-07-26, Thomas Harriot was the first to observe the Moon with a telescope. The drawing here (courtesy Wikipedia) is by Galileo Galilei and was published in March 1610 in *Sidereus Nuncius*. Harriot drew a superior map of the Moon in 1610, but his astronomical achievements remained unknown until 1785 (Chapman, 2008, *Journal of the BAA*, **118**, p.315).

The lower image (courtesy Wikimedia and NASA NSSDC) shows most of the far side of the Moon. The Soviet Luna 3 spacecraft took it as it passed the Moon, 50 years ago, on 1959-10-07.

40 years ago, on 1969-07-20, NASA's Apollo programme put the first two humans on the Moon. Bill Anders took this picture (courtesy Wikipedia and NASA) the year before from Apollo 8. Galileo had looked at the Moon and shown it to be imperfect and earth-like, now humans were looking back at Earth to find it a small blue marble in vast empty space.



The lower picture (courtesy Wikipedia and NASA) was taken by Neil Armstrong and shows Buzz (Edwin) Aldrin on the surface of the Moon. Michael Collins, who remained in lunar orbit, was amongst the majority of humans that had no television set to watch the event in real time.



Horst Meyerdierks

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