

Annual General Meeting, 2003 October 29

held at The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1

Guy Hurst, President

Ron Johnson, Nick Hewitt and Nick James, Secretaries

The President welcomed members to the Association's 2003 Annual General Meeting, and invited Dr Hewitt to read the minutes of the previous year's AGM. These met members' approval. Mr Hurst welcomed Mr David Freedman, auditor, and Mr Roy Dowsett, accountant, to the meeting, before inviting Mr David Tucker to speak.

Mr Tucker reported that the Association's accounts had been published in the 2003 October Journal. In summary, a trading loss of £20,041 had been reported, due largely to falls on the stock exchange further to those reported previously. However, if the proceeds of Neville Goodman's generous bequest were taken into consideration, the Association recorded a healthy profit. The treasurer expressed optimism that the financial climate would improve in the following session. It was of some consolation that the value of the Association's assets remained in excess of the original price at the time of investment, and, as such, the apparent losses over the past two sessions could be described as "paper losses".

In the absence of questions, Mr Tucker proposed that the accounts be adopted, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The treasurer proceeded to propose a vote of thanks to David Freedman and Roy Dowsett for their steadfast advice over the past year, and also to the outgoing President for his assistance and willingness to share his banking expertise. Mr Hurst returned a vote of thanks to Mr Tucker for his attentive handling of the Association's finances, and members applauded all.

The President proceeded to deliver his Annual Report, opening with the observation on 2002 October 4 of an optical Gamma Ray Burst (GRB) afterglow by BAA members Nick James, David Strange, Tom Boles and Martin Mobberley, believed to be the first amateur observation of such an event. These mysterious objects are similar to supernovae but fade much more rapidly – making observation a race against time in the hours after discovery. In November, the Leonids had given a spectacular show for those who had not been clouded out; particularly notable among the BAA images were those by Mrs Hazel McGee of a fireball at 4h09 UT, leaving a train visible for up to 30 seconds. December brought a total solar eclipse to Australia, which a significant BAA contingent had travelled to watch.

After New Year, The Peterborough Museum had been host to an exhibition celebrating the life's achievements of the late George Alcock. The Association was pleased to see Alcock's significant scientific contributions, as both a comet and nova hunter, being recognised more widely outside the circles of amateur astronomy. The news had turned somewhat sourer when bush fires had gutted much of the historical Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia, in 2003 January. Soon after, the Columbia space shuttle had broken up upon re-entry on February 1 with the tragic loss of all seven crew.

On a happier note, comet C/2001 V1 (NEAT) had provided a spectacular view passing within 0.1AU of the Sun at perihelion on February 18. Whilst this was not observable by amateurs, it had been possible to watch remarkable semi-live footage from the SOHO solar coronagraph on the Internet. In March, Tuukkanen, a Finnish observer, had made an unprecedented visual discovery of an optical GRB afterglow. This had been possible because the afterglow faded much more slowly on this occasion than is usual – curious in itself. Moving on, the President recounted the three major events of May: Mercury's transit of May 7, the lunar eclipse of May 16, and the annular solar eclipse of May 31. In the latter case, the annular phase had been visible to early-morning Scottish observers, whilst the remainder of Europe had witnessed a partial event.

In the nova/supernova scene, the year had been a memorable one, with a continuous stream of new discoveries by UK observers. August had been a particularly notable month, with a spurt of discoveries bringing the hundredth supernova event discovered by a UK amateur, with the number of novae discovered by the UK Nova Patrol coincidentally passing the same landmark within days. Whilst scientific publications had carried news of this superb accomplishment, the Association had been somewhat disappointed that the popular media had not shown greater interest, despite every effort by the Association's Public Relations Officer. August would also be remembered for the superb view of Mars greeting observers around its perihelion on 21st. The red planet had appeared exceptionally large at this opposition owing to its passing unusually close to the Earth, providing an excellent opportunity to observe its surface details close-up. Whilst there had been a number of other close approaches in recent years, none had been quite as close as this for nearly 60,000 years.

The President closed by reviewing the developments within the Association itself over the past year. There had been a number of highly successful meetings, including a series of observing workshops, a new venture. These had proved tremendously popular. A membership drive organised by Dr John Mason had yielded 456 new members –

a record compared to past Association publicity campaigns. Further good news came with the favourable report into light pollution by the Science and Technology committee, published in September. The Association had made numerous submissions, and had been called to speak to the Inquiry, which had reacted sympathetically upon hearing the concerns of the Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS). The report was likely to prove influential, recommending Government action to restore starry skies to the UK.

Mr Johnson was then invited to present the result of the ballot for Council, which were as follows: President: Tom Boles. Vice-President: Guy Hurst (ex-officio). Treasurer: David Tucker. Meetings Secretary: Dr Nick Hewitt. Papers Secretary: Nick James. Business Secretary: Ron Johnson. Other Members of Council: Dr David Boyd, Dr Richard Miles, Peter Hudson, Val White, Richard Flux, Geoffrey Johnstone, Callum Potter, Hazel Collett, Chris Lintott, Michael Maunder. Three further candidates had not obtained sufficient votes.

The President yielded the Chair to the Meeting Secretary, who welcomed him to deliver his Presidential Address, entitled *ProAm collaborations in Astronomy*. A report of this authoritative and thorough talk can be found elsewhere in this *Journal*. Following the enthusiastic applause for this address, Dr Hewitt recalled his delight when he had heard that Mr Hurst would be his successor. His energy and diplomatic skills had served him well in his tenure. As a promoter of amateur astronomy, he was willing to take on a vast amount of work: his Presidency of the Association had run in parallel with his long-term editorship of *The Astronomer*, and both responsibilities had been attended to with great diligence. Furthermore, he had remained devoted to the teaching of astronomy through evening classes. Mr Maurice Gavin added that the President's address was to be commended upon its depth. He thanked Mr Hurst for guiding Council over the past two years, a side of the Association which had run so smoothly as to make most members oblivious.

Following extended applause, Mr Hurst thanked his wife for her support, before welcoming the new President, Mr Tom Boles, wishing him every success. The AGM was adjourned until 2004.

Dominic Ford