

Ordinary Meeting, 2003 October 29

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

Tom Boles, President

Ron Johnson, Nick Hewitt and Nick James, Secretaries

Mr Tom Boles, the incoming President, opened the first Ordinary Meeting of the 114th session with the sombre news of the death of Henry Wildey, shortly after his 90th birthday. Mr Wildey had long been a friend of the Association, serving as Curator of Instruments for 27 years from 1951 to 1978, and receiving the Lydia Brown Medal and Gift in 1978. Members respectfully observed a moment of silence.

Dr Hewitt read the minutes of the eighth Ordinary Meeting of the previous session, held at the York weekend, and these were duly approved. At this point, the President took the opportunity to thank Mr Guy Hurst, outgoing President, for guiding the Association so skilfully over the previous two years, and for arranging affairs with such clarity prior to the handover. Mr Boles wished also to express his gratitude to those retiring members of Council.

Mr Johnson announced the receipt of a total of 34 presents, including a number of books from the estates of N. Goodman and A.J. Roberts. A. Kinder had donated three books: *Victorian Telescope Makers – Lives & Letters of Thomas Howard Grubb*, by I.S. Glass, *80 Not Out. The Autobiography*, by P.A. Moore, *Astronomy of the Bible*, by E.W. Maunder. R. McKim had donated three books: *Venus devant le Soleil*, by A. Simann (ed.), *Au Plus pres de la Planete Mars*, by P. Morel (ed.), *Un Siecle Astronomie*, by A. Dollfus. A. Loinger had donated a copy of his book *On Black Holes and Gravity Waves*, and a CDROM *Spectrohelioscope Goodies* had been donated by F.N. Veio.

Members showed appreciation to the donors of these gifts. The President announced the proposal of 49 new members, whilst the 79 members proposed at the previous meeting, finding the approval of the audience, were duly elected. Mr James announced the acceptance of three papers to appear in the Journal:

Emergence of low relief terrain from shadow – an explanation for some TLP, by Tony Cook
Henry McEwen of Glasgow: a forgotten astronomer?, by Richard McKim
Jupiter in 2000/2001 – Part II: Infrared and ultraviolet wavelengths, by John Rogers

The President announced that the next meeting would be held at 14:30 on Saturday November 29 at the Geological Society. The main speakers would be Nigel Henbest & Heather Couper, speaking on *Mars, the Inside Story*. Martin Mobberley and Geoffrey Johnson would also be speaking. Mr Boles then proceeded to welcome the evening's main speaker, Dr Richard McKim, Director of the Association's Mars Section.

The Great Perihelic Opposition of Mars 2003

Dr McKim began his presentation by asking the audience who had seen Mars with the naked eye in 2003: all hands were raised. Who had observed it telescopically? Most hands went up. But how many had actually sent their observations to the BAA? Just two hands were raised! The speaker asked all observers not to be modest and to send him their work: each contribution was part of the larger picture, and high-resolution CCD images were not the only type of observation wanted. The speaker demonstrated how telescopes of only 10 cm aperture had made valuable contributions during the current apparition.

Dr McKim said that it had been an exceptionally busy year, with a huge number of enquiries from members of the public, press, and BAA observers. The low altitude had deterred many UK observers, but it was now becoming much better placed despite the smaller disk diameter. A new Mars Section website had proven to be a great success. Referring to the reports of the observations appearing in the 2003 July, August and October Journals, together with records received up to the previous evening, Dr McKim described the thousands of CCD images and visual drawings that had been received. Compared with the year 2001, the apparition had been notable for the lack of large-scale dust activity, a regional storm in Hellas in July being the largest example to date. The shrinkage of the S. polar cap, lately very rapid, and the development of seasonal rifts and other features, together with the increase in 'white cloud' meteorology, was described in detail.

Standard Mars maps and Section members' observations illustrated the talk. There being no questions, the President asked the audience to return their thanks to the speaker.

Following prolonged applause for Dr McKim's lively and thorough account, Jonathan Shanklin was invited to make an announcement on behalf of the Comet Section. He urged members to observe Comet Encke, which was fast-brightening. Although professional CCD observers had returned faint magnitude estimates around 13-14, these were in part due to the combination of Encke's large diffuse appearance with the high resolving power of these instruments. The speaker's own observations with the Northumberland 12-inch refractor in Cambridge had

yielded an estimate of mag 12.5, whilst binocular observers were commonly reporting that it appeared around mag 9.9.

The President adjourned the meeting until November 29 at the same venue.

Dominic Ford