

# **Annual General Meeting, 2004 October 27**

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

**Tom Boles**, President

**Ron Johnson, Nick Hewitt and Nick James**, Secretaries

The President opened the 2004 Annual General Meeting, and invited Dr Nick Hewitt to read the minutes of the previous year's AGM. These were approved by the members present and signed. Mr Boles then welcomed Mr David Freedman, the Association's Auditor, and Mr Roy Dowsett, Accountant, to the meeting. Mr David Tucker, Treasurer, was invited to present the Accounts.

It was reported that a detailed statement of the accounts had been published in the October Journal. In summary, the Association had recorded a trading loss of £5,681 over the past year. However, this was substantially lower than that recorded the previous year, and as a result of a number of generous bequests, the Association's finances remained in a healthy state. Members were invited to ask questions, but with no issues having been raised, Mr Tucker proposed that the Accounts be adopted. This motion was seconded and passed *nem con*. The treasurer wished to record his gratitude to all who had contributed to the treasury affairs of the Association over the past year, especially Mrs Hazel McGee, who had assisted in typesetting the Accounts, and Messrs Freedman and Dowsett for their invaluable advice. Finally, the treasurer wished to draw members' attention to the Gift Aid forms distributed with the annual subscription form. By signing these, members who paid at least the standard rate of Income Tax allowed the Association, as a result of its charitable status, to reclaim from the Inland Revenue the tax paid on the price of the subscription. This amounted to £9.80 for standard membership, a valuable contribution to the Association, with no extra cost or effort incurred by members.

The President proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Tucker for his attentive work, serving the Association in an important capacity. He then proceeded to present his own summary of the events of the past year, from 2003 October through until 2004 September. Looking back, it had been such a busy year that it seemed hard to believe it had all happened in twelve months.

Starting with comets, Mr Boles recalled the year's two truly excellent specimens, 2001 Q4 (NEAT) and 2002 T7 (LINEAR), both of which had been around mag 3 at best, and images of each by the Association's own Martin Mobberley were shown. In addition, Comet Enke had made a rare close approach in 2003 November, which had been well observed. During the course of the year, there had been four amateur discoveries: 2003 Q3 (Tabur), 2004 F4 (Bradfield), 2004 Q1 (Tucker) and 2004 Q2 (Machholz). Over the past year, the Sun had been particularly active, giving rise to some fine auroral displays, including one on the night of the previous AGM. But undoubtedly the year's highlight had been a different solar phenomenon: the transit of Venus of 2004 June 8. For once, the UK weather had been superb, and most observers had enjoyed fine seeing conditions. Of many images taken by Association members, the President showed a selection of his personal favourites. There had also been two lunar eclipses, on 2003 November 9 and 2004 May 4, though the weather had been patchy on the latter occasion.

Some Association members had travelled to Antarctica to view the total solar eclipse of 2003 November 23. Sadly, the weather had proven rather a disappointment, though the trip was reported to have been amazing nonetheless, simply to see the Antarctic landscape. The President showed images of the eclipse taken by Derek Hatch through a thin cloud veil. With the year's enhanced solar activity had also come enhanced sunspot activity, and the speaker showed images by Damian Peach, taken with a Baader filter, of the sunspots of July 19, which had even been reported visible with the naked eye (with appropriate solar filter!) One of the more unexpected events of the year was the discovery of a new nebula by Jay McNeal on January 23, situated in Orion, around 10' from M78. An object had been noted in the region previously by IRAS, but it had only been visible in the infrared, now appearing to have spontaneously flared up and become visible at optical wavelengths.

Much excitement had stirred in early July, following the safe arrival of the *Cassini* probe in orbit of Saturn, at the end of a journey of nearly seven years from launch on 1997 October 15. The images released so far had been of exceptional quality, but of particular interest would be data returned by the *Huygens* probe, which was to descend into the atmosphere of Saturn's moon Titan on 2005 January 14 after separation from Cassini on December 25.

Moving on to his own specialist subject of supernova hunting, the President first recalled the discovery of 2004et by S. Morreti on 2004 September 27. Though not exceptional in itself, its host galaxy, NGC 6946 in Cepheus, had already hosted no less than seven previous supernovae in the past century: 1917A, 1939C, 1948B, 1967P, 1980K and 2002hh. The Association's supernova patrollers had enjoyed another successful year, with three discoveries by Ron Arbour, 23 by Mark Armstrong, and 20 by the speaker himself. The cumulative total number of UK discoveries was now 160: 13 by Arbour, 70 by Armstrong, whilst the speaker retained the lead with 77 events. Another notable patrol event was the discovery by Martin Mobberley on 2003 December 18 of what the speaker recalled him to have described in his own words as "my astounding, amazing, awesome M31 Nova".

The Association's members continued to produce a fine crop of planetary images, and the President paid particular tribute to the superb work of Damian Peach, showing his images of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Martin Mobberley's imaging was also singled out for special mention.

Moving onto the Association itself, the President thanked Pat Barber and Ann Davies for dealing so efficiently with the many enquiries received by the BAA Office over the course of the year, as well as Dr John Mason, who had handled media enquiries – he had always seemed to know what to do, and clearly had a deep understanding of the workings of the industry. The Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS) had had a particularly successful year, undertaking a great deal of work in collaboration with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), for which Bob Mizon and his national team were congratulated. Mrs Hazel McGee, Editor of the Journal, was thanked for her tireless work in maintaining its high quality. In the past year she had taken on an increased workload, no longer leaving the typesetting to printers, but instead completing it all in-house. This would give the Association greater control over its appearance in future. In addition, Nick James was thanked for continuing in his capacity as Papers Secretary to ensure the consistently high quality of the published papers.

The Annual Handbook for 2005, distributed with the October Journal, had been prepared by Gordon Taylor and Jacqueline Mitton, the latter of whom had now stepped down after serving as Editor for many years. Val White would take over the post from 2006, and the President wished her the best of luck. The President went on to thank all of the officers of the Association who kept it running so smoothly, especially to Ron Johnson, Business Secretary, and David Tucker, Treasurer. The Directors of the Observing Sections were also thanked for their tireless efforts on the front line, encouraging and assisting members to observe, as well as collating all their results. Special thanks were due to Dr Nick Hewitt, who had stepped down as Director of the Deep Sky Section after 11-years' service, and Stewart Moore was wished the best of luck taking over his post.

On the administrative side, the President thanked all the members of the previous year's Council, especially Callum Potter, who had produced a new much-improved website. On a personal note, Mr Boles thanked Guy Hurst, last year's President, for his advice and support throughout the year. On a sadder note, the President recalled that the deaths of three prominent former Association office-holders had been announced over the course of the year: Henry Wildey, one-time Curator of Instruments, Jeremy Cook, former Director of the Lunar Section, and Lionel Mayling, who had served as Assistant Treasurer.

Mr Boles thanked Nick Hewitt, Meetings Secretary, for, with the assistance of Hazel Collett, once again enduring the pressure of organising meetings, and for once again producing such an excellent programme. Dr Hewitt had given notice of his intention to step down from this post at the next AGM in October 2005, and so the President indicated that he would be very pleased to hear from any volunteers. After summarising the year's speaker meetings, special mentions were given to Dave Storey of the Isle of Mann Astronomical Society for co-organising the Association's visit to their region, as well as to Martin Mobberley for presenting his informative and entertaining Sky Notes instalments throughout the year in his characteristic, politically incorrect, style. To close, the President thanked all of the Association's members for their support over the year, especially to those who had submitted feedback or comments, or with whom he had had e-mail correspondence.

Following the applause for Mr Boles' summary of the year, Mr Ron Johnson was invited to present the results of the ballot for members of Council. Of 382 ballots received, 17 had been declared invalid due to outstanding subscription payments. The votes had been cast as follows. President: Tom Boles (351). Vice-President: Guy Hurst (elected ex-officio). Treasurer: David Tucker (342). Meetings Secretary: Nick Hewitt (333). Papers Secretary: Nick James (320). Business Secretary: Ron Johnson (327). Other members of Council: John Mason (329), Maurice Gavin (312), Peter Hudson (311), Hazel Collett (304), Val White (303), David Boyd (301), Michael Maunder (297), Roger Dymock (291), Martin Morgan-Taylor (289), Callum Potter (288). Mr Johnson proposed a vote of thanks to the scrutineers of the ballot, A. Davies, N. Grabasky and G. Harding.

Dr Nick Hewitt then took the chair, and invited Mr Boles to present his Presidential Address, entitled *Supernovae: Tools for Astronomers*. A report of this talk can be found elsewhere in this Journal. Following his presentation, Dr Hewitt thanked Mr Boles for giving an account of an area in which observational and theoretical astronomy could be seen so clearly to meet, and where amateur observations could be put to real use in testing theories produced by the professional community. The meeting was then adjourned until the following AGM, to be held on 2005 October 26 at the same venue, and the first Ordinary Meeting of the 115th Session followed.

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Dominic Ford