# Annual General Meeting, 2005 October 26
## 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 2005 Annual General Meeting, extending an especial welcome to Mr David Freedman and Mr Roy Dowsett, the Association's auditors. Dr Hewitt was invited to read the minutes of the previous year's meeting, which, receiving the approval of members, were duly signed. Mr Guy Hurst, Vice-President, was then invited to present the Association's accounts.

Mr Hurst explained that since the previous meeting, Mr David Tucker, the Association's Treasurer, had, at short notice and with regret, found himself unable to continue in his duties, as a result of the new time commitments demanded by his having taken increased responsibilities in his professional employment as an architect. Being unable to attend the present meeting, he had passed to the speaker the duty of presenting the accounts. As a full summary of these had appeared in the October *Journal*, Mr Hurst remarked only that the Association had recorded a healthy operating surplus of £??? over the course of the year, before inviting questions. As no issues were raised, he proposed that the accounts be adopted – a motion which was seconded and carried by the meeting.

Mr Hurst expressed his gratitude, on behalf of the meeting, to *Gates Freedman & Company*, auditors to the Association, and to Mr Roy Dowsett, Accountant, for his valuable services in advising Council on financial matters. Members applauded.

The President then proceeded to present his traditional annual report, which would on this occasion cover the months from 2004 October to 2005 September. Opening with a summary of what the sky had offered, perhaps Comet Macholtz, visible in December and January, had been most notable. Peaking at around mag 4, its passing within a degree of the *Pleiades* on January 7, shortly after maximum, had been an especially beautiful sight. Shortly afterwards, on January 13, Saturn's opposition had been magnificent – the rings briefly appearing much brighter the usual, a consequence of the Opposition Effect. And in the same eventful week, on January 14, the *Huygens* probe had made history, landing on Saturn's moon Titan, thereby becoming the first probe to land on a moon of another planet, the first to return images from the surface of so distant a body, and the first to reveal what lay beneath Titan's thick hydrocarbonaceous clouds. Many had predicted that it would find oceans of methane, possibly covering the entire planet; in the event, however, it had imaged surface relief, before touching down on solid ground.

In the spring, binary star γ-Virginis had passed periastron for the first time since 1835-6, on which occasion it had been observed by Herschel, Dawes and Smyth, amongst others. This time around, the components, closing to within 0"3, had for a time been unresolvable even to amateurs of the likes of Damian Peach, who, after closest approach had been the first Association member to successfully separate them on May 7. This feat had been achieved using a blue 350-450 nm filter whilst on an observing expedition to Barbados; he had estimated their separation to have been 0"35 at this time, according to his images.

July 4 had brought another space exploration first, as NASA's *Deep Impact* probe had smashed a 370-kg projectile into Comet 9P/Tempel at a speed of 10.2 km/s. It had been a tremendous engineering and scientific success, revealing much about the structure of cometary nuclei, though those amateurs who had been expecting a significant flare might have come away rather disappointed by its meagre visual brightening.

The UK's supernova patrollers had had a slow year; the weather had been some of the worst for years. At the end of September, Ron Arbour had had 16 discoveries to his name, Mark Armstrong 71, and the President himself 90. The total number of UK discoveries now stood at 177. One notable non-UK discovery, however, had been 2005cs, in M51, reported by Wolfgang Kloehr on June 28; given the *Whirlpool Galaxy*'s fame, many amateurs had subsequently found pre-discovery images in their archives. It was the second supernova in M51 in a very short period of time, preceded 11 years earlier by 1994i.

The year had seen several nova discoveries, including Ron Arbour's detection of a mag 15 event in M31 in January. Later in the year had come two well-observed specimens: Nova Cygnus 2005, discovered by Nishimura in February, and Nova Aquilla in June. On August 3, news had come that transneptunian 2003 UB313's orbit suggested it to be 97-AU distant, which, given its visual brightness of mag 18.7, placed size estimates at one-and-a-half times Pluto's radius, assuming a typical albedo. This made it the largest Sun-orbiting body to have been discovered since Neptune in 1846, and had opened debate as to whether it could be called a tenth planet. Christened '*Sedna*', the latest reports suggested that it might have an unresolved moon – an exciting development, as an orbital determination would allow a more accurate mass estimate of the parent body to be made. At the same time, though, if some of its luminosity were to be attributed to a moon, this would invariably decrease its predicted

size.

Turning briefly to the planetary scene, the President remarked that this year's apparition of Mars had arguably been the finest chance to observe the Red Planet for 14 years; though its angular size had been a little less than that seen in 2003, its more northerly declination had placed it at a much more favourable altitude in the UK's skies this year.

It had been a year of change in the Association's Office; after many years of excellent service, Patricia Barber had stepped down as Assistant Secretary. She was a hard act to follow, but Mesdames Jean Felles and Val Stoneham were doing a superb job, taking advantage of the transition to install a new computer system. The Association's other officers had also continued to provide steadfast service: John Mason was thanked for his work as Publicity Officer in handling media enquiries and membership campaigns, whilst all of the Section Directors were given especial thanks for encouraging members in their observing work, and collating the results. Bob Mizon and the Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS) were congratulated for their work in lobbying for legislation against intrusive light pollution, which had this year reached the statute books for the first time.

Mrs Hazel McGee was thanked for her industrious work in editing the *Journal* – its quality was not only maintained, but improved – and Mr Nick James, Papers Secretary, for his unfailing efforts to ensure that the standard of the submitted papers was maintained. Ms Val White was congratulated on the fine results of her first year as editor of the Association's annual *Handbook*, and Mr Gordon Taylor for ensuring such a smooth handover of this rôle. The President further thanked Mr Callum Potter, Webmaster, for overseeing a change of the Association's Internet Service Provider (ISP), and working tirelessly throughout the year to keep its website up-to-date.

All of the members of the previous year's Council were thanked for their work behind the scenes, ensuring the Association's smooth running. Especial mentions were given to Richard Flux, organiser of the very successful Winchester Weekend, and the outgoing treasurer, David Tucker – who was thanked and offered all best wishes upon his departure.

Sadly, the year had brought unhappy news as well. On August 29, David Sinden had passed away; he had been a long-standing friend of the Association, and a member since 1949. His interest in amateur astronomy had been by no means eclipsed by his professional work as Chief Optician for *Grubb Parsons*, through which he had had a cardinal rôle in the construction of such mirrors as the 4.2 m for the *William Herschel Telescope*, the 3.9 m for the *Anglo-Australian Telescope*, and the new corrector plate for the 48" *Oschin Schmidt* at Mt Palomar. After the demise of *Grubb Parsons* in 1983, he had formed his own company, *Sinden Optics*, which had produced fine mirrors for both amateur and professional applications.

The President turned finally to summarise the Association's own activities over the past year, taking the opportunity first to thank Dr Nick Hewitt, Meetings Secretary, for once again providing such a fine crop of speakers, and Mrs Hazel Collett, who, having assisted him so ably over the past year, would be taking over the job for the coming session.

November had seen the Association's first Joint Meeting with the Royal Meteorological Society, which had generated a large amount of positive feedback: it had been an unusual opportunity to see broader aspects of a common science. In January, the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Sir Patrick Moore's election to the Association had been celebrated – a happy event, though it had been sad to see Sir Patrick so frail, reluctantly conceding it likely to be his last appearance at a BAA meeting. On April 9, an Association-commissioned plaque commemorating the life of George Alcock had been unveiled in Peterborough Cathedral by the Astronomer Royal, Prof Sir Martin Rees. It seemed a fitting tribute to the life of a man whose mastery of the art of visual comet hunting was surely surpassed by none.

To close, Mr Boles wished to thank all of those members with whom he had had communication over his two year tenure as President; their feedback and suggestions had been invaluable.

The President then invited the Business Secretary, Mr Ron Johnson, to announce the results of the ballot for Council for the coming session. Mr Johnson declared that 502 ballot papers had been received, cast thus: President: Richard Miles, 460; Vice-President: Tom Boles – elected ex-officio; Treasurer: David Tucker – candidacy withdrawn; Secretary (Meetings): Hazel Collett, 420; Secretary (Papers): Nick James, 434; Secretary (Business): Ron Johnson, 438. Votes for other members of Council were as follows: Nick Hewitt, 427; Maurice Gavin, 408; David Boyd, 393; Valerie White, 391; John Mason, 383; Anne Davies, 372; Mark Armstrong, 365; Roger Dymock, 350; Martin Morgan-Taylor, 320; Michael Maunder, 315; Sheridan Williams, 310; Geoffrey Johnstone, 292. Due to outstanding subscription charges, nine ballot papers had been invalid.

Mr Johnson announced that since the distribution of ballot papers, and as mentioned earlier, the Association's Treasurer, Mr David Tucker, had resigned and withdrawn his candidacy for the post in the coming session. Mr David Boyd had kindly agreed to fill the post, and thus withdrawn his candidacy as a General Member of Council. Furthermore, the speaker was saddened to report that ill-health had recently forced the Director of the Asteroids

and Remote Planets Section, Dr Andy Hollis, to stand down. Mr Roger Dymock would be taking over that rôle, thus also withdrawing his candidacy from the ballot. After the removal of these two names, ten candidates remained in the ballot for the ten remaining Council positions; all were thus elected to serve.

After thanking the scrutineers of the ballot for their attentive work, Mr Boles proceeded to deliver his final Presidential Address, entitled *Astronomers' Tools For Supernovae – Their Discovery and Follow-Up*. He offered a personal account of the process of finding supernova candidates, checking them, and reporting them, including a survey of some of the other amateur patrols from around the world, as well as of the professional competition presented by robotised surveys. A full report of this excellent talk can be found on page ??? of this *Journal*.

Following the applause, Mr Boles congratulated Dr Miles upon his election as President, adjourned the meeting until 2006 October 25, and invited the new President to take the chair for the following Ordinary Meeting.

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Dominic Ford