

Annual General Meeting, 2007 October 21

held at New Hunts House, Guys Hospital, London Bridge, London SE1

Richard Miles, President

Ron Johnson, Hazel Collett and Nick James, Secretaries

The President opened the 2007 Annual General Meeting and invited Dr Nick Hewitt to read the minutes of the previous AGM on the behalf of the Meetings Secretary. These were approved by the audience and duly signed. The President welcomed Mr David Freedman, of the Association's auditors, and Mr Roy Dowsett, its Accountant, to the Meeting, and then invited Dr David Boyd, Treasurer, to speak.

Dr Boyd reported that the Association's accounts had been published in its *Journal* in October. In summary, they showed an operational surplus of £11,909; financially, this had been the Association's strongest Session for several years. Dr Boyd invited questions from the audience, but there were none. He thus proposed that the accounts be adopted, and this motion was seconded and passed *nem con*.

The President expressed his thanks to Messrs Boyd, Dowsett and Freedman for once again ensuring the smooth running of the Association's financial affairs. He wished especially to thank Mr Dowsett, who would be retiring from his post as Accountant at the end of the calendar year. Members applauded. The President then proceeded to present his traditional Annual Report of the Association's activities.

Annual Report 2006-7

The President reported that just as the Association's finances were in good shape, so too were its membership figures; on 2007 July 31 there had been 2,967 members, up from 2,904 a year previously. Sadly, however, he nonetheless had to report the deaths of some notable friends of the Association. In 2006 December, it had mourned the loss of Edward Ellis, one of its most talented planetary observers. It had also noted with sadness the passing of New Zealander Dr Frank Bateson, who, though never a BAA member, would be remembered by the Variable Star Section for his keen support of its pro-am activities.

Turning to the Association's publications, the President reported that its *Journal* had maintained its high standard over the past year, for which he extended his thanks to Mrs Hazel McGee, Editor. He was pleased to report that following negotiation with the printers, every page of future issues would be printed in full colour. The Association's *Handbook* had been published once again this year, compiled by Gordon Taylor and edited by Mrs Valerie White. There was an ongoing debate about the future rôle of this publication, in an age when much of its content was now duplicated on the World Wide Web, and many of its historical functions seemed to have been superseded by planetarium software packages. Comments and suggestions were welcomed, and the President announced that all members would shortly be receiving a questionnaire inviting discussion about its future.

The Association's website was ever-expanding as a source of information, and the President thanked Callum Potter for his work as webmaster over the past year. The website now included an extensive discussion board as well as a members-only section from which electronic copies of publications could be downloaded.

The past year had been one of upheaval for the Association's Office, which had had to move out of Burlington House for the duration of lengthy renovation work; it had found temporary accommodation on Hallum Street. This work was shortly to be completed, and so over the next few weeks, the Office would be moving back into Burlington House. It would be closed for the duration of the move. The newly renovated accommodation would unfortunately have limited space to house the Association's Library, and so a committee had been formed to rationalise its contents. Some items had been sold, while others had been offered to the membership at no cost. Before moving on, the President noted that the Office had recruited a second employee in July – Madeleine Crow – to whom he extended a warm welcome.

The recipients of the Association's Awards and Medals for 2007 had been announced at its Exhibition Meeting at the National Science Centre in Leicester in June. The Horace Dall Medal and Gift had been awarded to Mr Peter Wise, the Merlin Medal and Gift to Hans Jörg Mettig, and the Steavenson Award to Mr Peter Birtwhistle. The President extended his warmest congratulations to all.

Earlier in the year, the Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS) had collaborated with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in a project to map out the extent of light pollution across the UK. During the moonless evenings of 2006 December 20–24 and 2007 January 14–21, members had been invited to count the number of stars visible to the naked eye in an easily-recognisable rectangle of sky in Orion, enclosed at its four corners by the stars Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, Rigel and Saiph. They had been asked to submit their results to the CfDS, together with the latitude and longitude of their observation site. The President showed a map of the results returned, commenting

that the geographic coverage had been very good. The star counts received were well correlated with satellite images of light pollution produced by the US *Defense Meteorological Satellite Program* (DMSP): fewer stars were visible where the DMSP had revealed the greatest light pollution. The CfDS planned to repeat the experiment in coming years to measure how light pollution issues were evolving.

On April 24, the BBC's *Sky at Night* series had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its first broadcast. Sir Patrick Moore had presented all but one of the monthly programs over those 50 years, and was now the longest-serving presenter of any television series in the world, by a considerable margin. On the day of the anniversary, the Association had presented him with a card containing 269 personal messages from members; a film of the presentation had been broadcast on the *Sky at Night* on May 3.

The President then summarised some of the observations made by Association members in the past year. Among special commendations, Gary Poyner was congratulated upon having submitted his 200,000th visual magnitude estimate to the Variable Star Section on April 17. Members applauded. Tom Boles had made six supernova discoveries: 2006ss, 2007ck, 2007iq and 2007iv. Ron Arbour had made two supernova discoveries in quick succession – 2007av on March 20 and 2007ax on March 22 – his first for two years.

There had been two fine comets – 2006 P1 (McNaught) and 17P/Holmes – both of which had outburst in quite unexpected ways. The speaker would say nothing about the latter, which would be discussed in detail by Nick James in his Sky Notes at the Ordinary Meeting later in the evening. Comet McNaught, however, had been a fine naked-eye sight from the UK in early January, though by the time it had reached its best, it had been too far south for observation from these shores. Observers in the southern hemisphere had seen its naked-eye tail grow in length to 15° and take on a curved, filamentary appearance. From the UK, it had only been visible for a few days after its perihelion on January 12, and even then, only for a few minutes after sunset. Despite these restrictions, however, many UK observers had still captured some fine images.

The President closed by expressing his thanks to all who had supported him throughout his presidency. Mr Ron Johnson, Business Secretary, was then invited to announce the results of the ballot for Council. He reported that 475 votes had been received, cast as follows. President: Roger Pickard (428). Treasurer: David Boyd (428). Meetings Secretary: Hazel Collett (334). Papers Secretary: Nick James (351). Business Secretary: Ron Johnson (338). Other members of Council: Nick Hewitt (361), Anne Davis (358), Valerie White (357), Sheridan Williams (333), Alan Dowdell (331), Peter Hudson (324), Geoffrey Johnstone (307), Mike Maunder (278), Mike Harlow (266), Dick Chambers (257). The four remaining candidates had not been elected, but were urged to consider standing again in future years. Three votes had been declared invalid. Mr Johnson closed by proposing a vote of thanks to the scrutineers of the ballot, and members applauded.

The President then proceeded to present his Presidential Address, entitled *Asteroids: Past, Present and Future*, an account of which can be found on page ?? of this *Journal*.

Following the applause for his talk, Dr Miles adjourned the AGM until 2008 October 29 and invited the Association's new President, Mr Roger Pickard, to take the chair for the first Ordinary Meeting of the new session. Members applauded.

Dominic Ford