

Annual General Meeting, 2008 October 29

**held at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly,
London SE1**

Roger Pickard, President

Ron Johnson, Hazel Collett and Nick James, Secretaries

The President opened the 2008 AGM and invited Mrs Hazel Collett, Meetings Secretary, to read the minutes of the previous year's meeting. These were approved by members, subject to minor correction, and duly signed. The President then invited the Association's Treasurer, Dr David Boyd, to address the Meeting.

Dr Boyd reported that the Association's Accounts for the year ending 2008 June 30 had been published in the *Journal* in October¹ and that, in summary, an operational surplus of £2,642 had been recorded over the year. Although this surplus was substantially smaller than that which had been recorded in 2006-7, Dr Boyd remarked that in view of the present economic situation, and the losses being reported by many other organisations whose assets were more heavily invested in the stock markets, it was a relief that the BAA had made any surplus at all. Dr Boyd invited questions, but there were none. He then proceeded to propose that the Meeting adopt the published accounts, and this motion was seconded by Dr Nick Hewitt and passed *nem con*.

Dr Boyd went on to report that Council had decided to change the Association's auditors for the 2007-8 Session in order to reduce costs. The Accounts for 2007-8 had thus been audited by Chappell Cole & Co. Ltd, and in view of the good service that had been provided, Dr Boyd proposed that they be reappointed for the coming year. This proposal was carried *nem con*.

The President then invited Mr Ron Johnson, Business Secretary, to announce the result of the ballot for members of Council for the coming session. Mr Johnson reported that the result of the ballot was as follows. President: Roger Pickard, 382. Treasurer: David Boyd, 388. Meetings Secretary: Hazel Collett, 359. Papers Secretary: Nick James, 370. Business Secretary: Ron Johnson, 361. Other members of Council: Tom Boles, 353; John Mason, 352; Valerie White, 346; Mike Harlow, 328; Peter Hudson, 327; Dick Chambers, 313; Martin Morgan-Taylor, 308; Alan Dowdell, 303; Mike Maunder, 301; David Arditti, 289; Tony Morris, 209. Subsequent to the ballot, Alan Dowdell had withdrawn his nomination, and Council had co-opted Tony Morris to take his place. Tom Boles had attained the highest number of votes in the election for Council, and so would become a Vice-President of the Association for the coming year. Mr Johnson closed his report by proposing a vote of thanks to the scrutineers of the ballot.

The President then presented a summary of the Association's activities over the past year.

Annual Report 2007-8

The President began by reporting that in October and November 2007, the Association's Office had been able to return from its temporary accommodation to Burlington House, where its apartment at the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) was now newly refurbished. He thanked all those who had assisted with the move, including the Office's staff, Jean Felles and Madeleine Crow, their husbands, Brian Felles and Martin Crow, and many other members. The President reported that as the new apartment did not have space for a library, a committee had been set up to divide the contents of the old library between those historic items which would be kept in storage, and those items which could be sold off. In the course of the extensive refurbishment of Burlington House, the RAS had built a new lecture theatre, which had become the home of the Association's meetings since January 2008.

The President went on to thank all of the Directors of the Observing Sections for their work, giving especial mention to Mr Roger Dymock, who was retiring as Director of the Asteroids and Remote Planets Section and would be replaced by Dr Richard Miles. He also thanked the editors of the Association's publications, noting that there had been some modernisations here.

Over the past year, the rôle of the annual *Handbook* had been thoroughly reviewed to identify any areas in its traditional content which could be considered redundant and any areas of new content which could usefully be added. As a part of this review, questionnaires had been sent out to all members in late 2007 to establish which sections of it were commonly used, and what proportion of the membership used the *Handbook* at all. The responses had been collated in time for some changes to be adopted in the 2009 *Handbook*, and it was hoped that further changes would be made in time for the 2010 *Handbook*. The President thanked Mrs Valerie White and Mr Gordon Taylor for their work as editors, noting that the changes to the traditional format of the data had added new challenges to their work this year. Messrs Nick James and Sheridan Williams were thanked for their technical assistance in making it possible to send the final text to the printers in digital format for the first time.

The President reported that the Association's website had continued to develop over the past year thanks to the work of Callum Potter as webmaster. The site now featured more complete Sky Notes articles, and video recordings of meetings would soon be made available. Mrs Hazel McGee was thanked for her continuing work as Editor of the *Journal*.

The President went on to offer his congratulations to the recipients of the Association's annual awards, which had been presented at the Exhibition Meeting in June. The Steavenson Award had been presented to Jeremy Shears; the Merlin Medal and Gift had been presented to Tom Boles; and the Walter Goodacre Medal and Gift had been presented to Ron Arbour. He was also pleased to congratulate Mr Mike Maunder upon his fiftieth year of BAA membership, and wished him many more. On a less happy note, he had had to report the deaths of several members over the past year, including Keith Abineri (1920-2007), Steve Evans (1953-2008) and Peter Foley (1930-2007).

The President closed his Annual Report with a summary of the observations which Association members had made over the past year. The most observed object of the year had surely been Comet 17P/Holmes, which had made a sudden and unexpected naked-eye apparition in October 2007. The total solar eclipse of August 1 had also attracted a good number of observers; totality had been visible across northern Canada, Russia and China, meanwhile those who had stayed in the UK had seen a partial eclipse, with total area coverage of 12% in London and 23% in Edinburgh.

Turning to the association's asteroid and supernova hunters, the President congratulated Peter Birtwhistle upon the discovery of his 100th main-belt asteroid, 2008 GE3, on April 7. He noted that Mr Birtwhistle had since extended his tally to 111. Tom Boles had discovered nine new supernovae in the past year: 2008X, 2008af, 2008ai, 2008aj, 2008ak, 2008en, 2008eo, 2008ep and 2008er; his tally now stood at 117. The President wished to draw especial attention to Mr Boles' remarkable achievement of having twice discovered three supernovae within a single night's observing; these triplets had been 2008ai, 2008aj and 2008ak on February 12/13, and 2008en, 2008eo and 2008ep on the morning of August 3. Ron Arbour was also congratulated for having discovered one new supernova, 2008S, in NGC 6946 on February 2.

Finally, turning to his home soil of the Variable Star Section (VSS), the President congratulated Mr Gary Poyner upon his fine observations of BL Lac object OJ 287, made as a part of the VSS's Observing Campaign for the object. He noted that these observations had been of such quality that Poyner had been listed as a co-author on a professional research paper in the prestigious journal *Nature*.²

Following the applause for his *Annual Report*, the President proceeded to deliver his *Presidential Address*, entitled *Variable Stars and Stellar Evolution*, an account of which can be found on page ?? of this *Journal*. At the close of this talk, Mr Bob Marriott proposed a vote of thanks to the President, noting that whilst he had thanked many members of the Association in the course of his *Annual Report*, his own efforts surely deserved recognition as well. Members responded with extended applause. The meeting was then adjourned and the first Ordinary Meeting of the 119th Session followed.

Dominic Ford

References

¹ *J. Brit. Astron. Assoc.*, **118**(5), 271-287 (2008)

² Valtonen M. J., *et al.*, *Nature*, **452**, 851 (2008)