

SIRIUS ISSUES

Issue: 1

Autumn 2001

NOW FOR SOMETHING NEW

You are reading the first edition of the Astronomical Society's new newsletter. The society has gone without a newsletter for a number of years now, but as the new Communications Officer I am committed to keeping the members of the society informed as to what is going on in the world of Astronomy. This will mean producing at least one newsletter per term, and maintaining the society website, which will contain up to date information about relevant topics.

In order to keep the newsletter interesting and to keep the articles varied, I invite all members to donate material such as information about current astronomical topics, or news of astronomical events, and I will try to include them in the newsletters.

I hope this newsletter will be a successful endeavor and I look forward to hearing your comments. Thanks.

OUT WITH THE OLD.....

As cloud blanketed the Birmingham sky, strange murmurings could be heard coming from the Physics department. Dark silhouettes approached the door, which upon entering could mean big changes to the world as we know it. Well changes in the Astrosoc constitution anyway. Yes that's right it's that time of year again and that means AGM.

The proceedings went well this year, no wine and cheese, but the smell of ex-chairperson Michelle Rosenthal's cooking filled the room, her cakes, as usual, a welcome addition to the evening. The meeting was attended by around half of the members of the society, and Barry Weston (Course 1 and Astrolab) was there to ensure the evening went smoothly and deal with any of the rowdy sort.

The meeting opened with reports from the chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and external relations officer, and between them they managed to cover an entire years hard work. As far as the constitution was concerned, it was saved of any amendments, which I am sure the new secretary is very happy about. A few additions to the roof rules were necessary though to ensure the safety of members.

The enthusiasm of the new members was mirrored when it came to the election for the new Committee. Somewhat sad and thoughtful faces appeared around the room as the old committee realized it was time to give someone else a chance, but all committee positions were re-filled, with five of the seven positions being taken by

first year students, which is excellent. The results of the elections are as follows:

Chairperson - Thomas Ormston
Secretary – Emma Robinson
Treasurer – Samuel George
External Relations - Gwennan Hughes
Observing officer - Léon Gaillard
Vice Observing officer - Natalie Mackey
Communications - Steven Spreckley

Two of the previous years committee remained, but in different roles. They were Léon Gaillard, who was external relations last year, and me - Steven Spreckley, who was secretary last year.

At the end of the meeting photographs of the old and new committee were taken, and then it was off into the yonder in search of the great Birmingham cuisine that is Balti.

I wish all of the new committee good luck and hope they can continue the work done by last year's committee and raise the society's profile in the University, bringing back the vibrancy that Astrosoc once had.

OPERATION: PIGEON POO

After the inability to use the mounted telescope on the roof of the Poynting Physics building for over a year due to a problem of water building up underneath it, and a problem with the runners and doors, it was the hope of all that this year we would finally be able to bring it out of its shed once again. It appears that some of our animal friends had other ideas about this though. A certain member of the dove family (clue in the title of the story) decided to roost in the shed and by the state the shed was left in appeared to have had a great time whilst doing so. Joking aside, the mess did need cleaning up though, and two of the men from the workshop G.H. Giles, and M. G. Wicks did a fantastic job of cleaning the shed, as well as putting new runners under it and sorting out the water problem. Thanks also to Steve Brookes, foreman of the workshop.

The remainder of the cleaning of the telescope was left in the hands of Leon Gaillard. His story follows:

On visiting the shed on the roof it was immediately obvious that some impressive work had gone into it, meaning that the doors now shut properly, and it was laid on a fantastic new set of rails too. This time everything had been drained, so fingers crossed we

won't get as large a pond in the future. Next I took a look inside at the entombed relic. The telescope was not as bad as I had expected. The gearing was fine, well preserved in all the grease I hope. Ok it was encrusted fairly heavily with rapidly fossilising pigeon poop, but that should be remedied in an afternoon or two's worth of soap and scrubbing. The date of this clean up operation is down to the weather, and fitting in with mine and Barry's timetables.

LEONIDS LIGHT UP THE SKY (ALMOST)

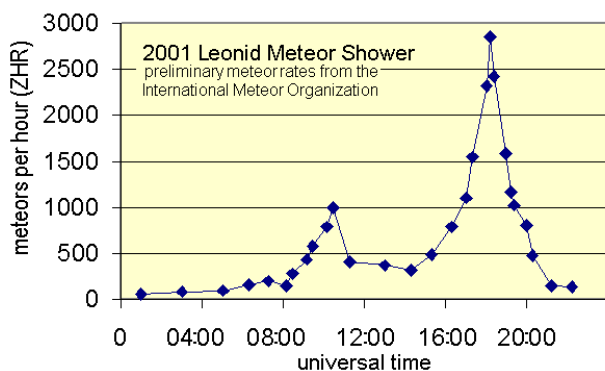
Samuel George writes about the attempt by some of the Astrosoc members to see the Leonids meteor shower:

The night began with high expectation, well sort of – it was cloudy, but we were all hopeful that it would clear up and we might actually see a bit of the meteor shower.

After sitting around for a while in the coffee lounge and drink hot chocolate (that machine must love AstroSoc!) it was time to go up and check out the night sky – and what did we see? Well not much was the answer! The sky was cloudy for the whole night and yet again the weather in Birmingham has let us all down. At least for us who where there we got to see some very questionable activities going on in the Guild – via the binoculars! If you want to know more about that just ask Tom and I am sure he will be more than happy to tell you.

So at about 3 a.m. (I think anyway!) we decided to call it a night and left it, however we might not have seen much ourselves but that was an entirely different matter for other people around the world. Some observers across the globe witnessed over one thousand meteors per hour.

For meteor watchers in the United States and Canada, the peak arrived around 5 a.m. (EST), and Japanese observers reported several meteors per second during a second peak visible from eastern Asia and Australia.



The meteors generally had a white colouration however there was the odd few reported to be of other colours,

such as green. Some of the meteors even left dust trails (see inserted picture by John Chumack via Astronomy.com) that due to the wind gave spectacular patterns and colours – what a shame we did not see anything in Birmingham – well there's always next year, but from a person who has lived in Birmingham all of his life I very much doubt that! Let's hope the weather holds out as Scientists expect Earth to sweep up even more Leonids in 2002 than it did this year, however the moon will brighten the sky preventing us from seeing many of them.



DOBSONIAN DILEMMA

You will probably be aware that the Dobsonian telescope that the society use has been having a few problems lately. The telescope has a tendency to slip in the vertical plane once the object of choice has been found. The good news is that the workshop will put a fix to this by adding some kind of locking mechanism on the telescopes vertical rotation axis and this should be done by early next term.

POINT OF INTEREST

Leon visited Kings Norton School for boys recently and they said that they would be interested in forging a link with the society. This could be useful if members of the society wish to give talks, and also helps us keep up our aim of raising awareness of astronomy in the community.

On a final note I would like to wish everyone a very

