

Altair

Newsletter of the Croydon Astronomical Society



June 2009 Issue

Hello and welcome to our sixth edition of Altair

Lectures this month

All our lectures are held at the Royal Russell School, and start at 7.45pm

Friday 5th June

Prof. Louise Harra, from Mullard Space Science Laboratory, will talk to us on the latest research, on our local star, the Sun.

Friday, 19th June

In another one of our series of 'Letter of Astronomy' lectures; three of our members will be talking on an astronomical subject, beginning with the letter L.

Norman Fisher Observatory, Kenley

The observatory will continue to be open on the Fridays we are not at the Royal Russell School (members), and Saturdays, throughout the summer. Usually we will open around 20:00 UT. Please telephone the observatory beforehand on 020 8668 9642.

Using your donations we recently made several purchases which will be used to improve the observatory facilities; for example sand used for crazy paving being laid in front of the observatory. The crazy paving was free, being illegally dumped near the observatory last January.

Please note we are holding a series of work parties during the summer. We will let you know through Altair_b and the newsletter when they are scheduled.

Altair_b

The society has an email discussion group. This allows us to relay information on events, or for members who have an astronomical problem to ask for help. Details can be found on our website at: www.croydonastro.org.uk.

Mary Ackworth Evershed (1867-1949)

Currently as a student of English, it seems appropriate for me to write a short article on Mary Ackworth Evershed, as her interests of amateur astronomy and poetry are close to my heart.

The beginning of the 20th century was not a good time for female astronomers; among other reasons was because Cambridge University did not accept women into their domain until 1948. Also, they were thought to be of a delicate nature so observing sunspots and solar flares was thought to be a good activity for them as they would avoid the chilly night air.

Mary, a founder member of the BAA (British Astronomical Association), met her husband-to-be John, (who had an observatory in Kenley), at one of the meetings and they spent their time eclipse chasing. Marrying in 1906, they worked at the Kodaikanal observatory in southern India for seventeen years, keeping extensive records on their solar observations. On their return Mary became a member of the RAS (Royal Astronomical Society), one of the first women to do so.

She very much admired the poet Dante, (himself an astronomer), and wrote a book about him, published in 1914, praising his description of the heavens. The book was successful in that it showed women could be successful in a subject such as astronomy.

She and her husband moved to Ewhurst in Surrey where Mary died in 1949.

An under-rated female astronomer who is not particularly well known yet has made valuable contributions to this area of science.

Poem – Vivienne Marshall

Stars

Like jewels in the sky
Spots of light twinkling
Night after night
Even if we cannot see them
Patterns of light appear as if by magic
After dark
And disappear as soon as day breaks

JENAM 2009

What happens if you put 1100 Astronomers, a Mars Rover and several exhibits in a University for a week? The answer, if what happened in mid April at the University of Hertfordshire is anything to go by, is a Joint European National Astronomy Meeting. The RAS normally organise a National Astronomy Meeting each year but this year it joined with the European Astronomical Society to host the European meeting in the UK – the first time this has happened for 15 years.

The meeting is aimed at professional astronomers but there was a small group of amateurs who attended including me. Of course some of the professionals wear two hats – they are involved in research of various forms during the day but when night falls they get their telescopes out and start observing for real!

There is not space here to give any more than a flavour of the meeting as the abstract of the talks run to over 300 pages. The format this year was based on a single plenary session first thing in the morning. This had two or three speakers who presented an overview or some recent results of their research at a level designed to update people who were not specialists in the field. After a break, where people could speak to each other or visit the exhibits while consuming the coffee & cakes, there were a number of parallel sessions. These ranged from detailed discussions on cosmology, through new astronomical facilities being planned, to subjects such as IYA2009 and Pro-Am collaboration. The major problem was deciding which sessions not to attend as quite often several interesting subjects were being held simultaneously. Following the last session dinner was served and this was followed by a number of evening entertainments ranging from 5 a side football game, mostly between the various universities, a trip to London for a river cruise and a formal dinner. If you did not like this there were also a series of public lectures in the evening with subjects ranging from Music & Astronomy to the history of William Herschel.

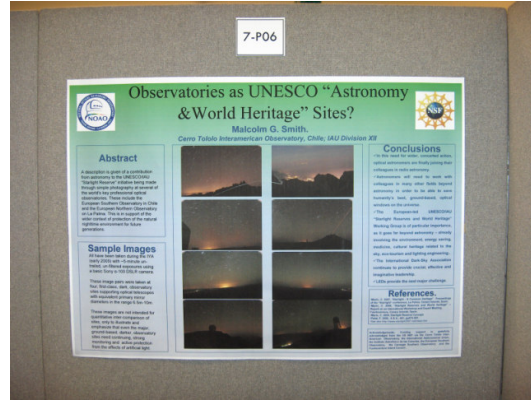
In addition there were a number of stands ranging from publishers of astronomical books to ESA & ESO who were showing the state of the art in space and ground based astronomical facilities. Did I mention there was also a large hall full of posters where people were showing off their individual research in one A1 poster? I found most of these quite difficult to follow. EADS Astrium were also in attendance – they brought their prototype Mars Rover called 'Bridget' along. For the first day she was imprisoned in a red sandpit in a marquee while the minister for science visited, only being allowed to escape to find a mains plug to charge her batteries. However the marquee was a bit out of the way so later she was allowed out and as the image shows she was quite capable of doing pirouettes on a steep grass bank – very useful if there is grass on Mars.

Should you attend any of these meetings? My view is that if you have a reasonable knowledge of astronomy you should be able to understand most of the talks – some though may not be understandable but it is easy to go to another simultaneous session where the subject matter is easier. The abstracts provide a reasonable guide.

Will I know anyone if I attend? Well I am likely to be there and there was at least one ex-CAS member attending who is now a professional astronomer. In addition there were perhaps 10 - 15 people there who have given us lectures at the CAS and a number who have spoken to the SPA.

Next year the National Astronomy Meeting is from April 12th – 17th April 2010 at the University of Glasgow.

John Murrell



Main Astronomical Events in June

6th – Venus at dichotomy (half-phase).

7th – Full Moon.

13th – Mercury greatest elongation, West (24°).

16th – Possible June Lyrids (favourable for checking).

19th – Dwarf planet Ceres ½° north of Theta Leonis.

23rd – Dwarf planet Pluto at opposition.

Moon

• Full Moon	Last quarter	New Moon	First quarter
07d 18h	15d 22h	22d 19h	29d 11h

• Lunar occultations

Date	Star	Mag	Time	Alt°	Az°	PA°
30 Jun	69 Virginis	4.8	20h 37m	17	211	159

If you take any images of these please send them to me at the email address below or hand a picture to me during a meeting, and we will publish it in Altair and/or our website.

International Year of Astronomy

We have a couple events coming up over the next few months.

The first of these will be on the weekend of 6th /7th June. Caterham will be holding an open day of local buildings, which will include the observatory. We hope to do some solar observing and allow people to use the main telescope to look around the local airfield. Please note that this is a daytime event. It does not get dark enough till well past 22:00 in June, which is late for a public event. The observatory will be open between 11am and 5pm. We would appreciate as much help as possible.

On Saturday 20th June, the CAS will be holding a ramble through the planets, at Otford in Kent. Otford is near Sevenoaks, just off the A25. We meet in the main car park, near the playing fields at 10.30am.

The walk should take around an hour 45 minutes to two hours to complete. Just in time for lunch at a local pub. In the afternoon we hope to visit the local museum which houses some interesting local and astronomical features. The event is free, apart from food and drink at the pub and museum charge. A map can be found on the CAS calendar on our website. Nearer the time we will have them available at lecture meetings.

On 27th June, the society will also be holding a picnic at the observatory, at 6pm. Bring your own food and drink, we will supply a BBQ if you wish cook something, (weather permitting). No ticket required, just turn up.

July 4th brings the Nightlife/SAGAS summer astronomy event, which will be held at Royal Maritime Club, Queen Street, Portsmouth. It starts at 10.30am; however the doors open at 9am. The cost is £10 to members of this society, otherwise the cost is £12. Details can be found on the Nightlife website, at www.nightlife.demon.co.uk.

Editor: Vivienne Marshall

If you would like to submit a picture or an article, please send by emailing me at: cm003g3932@blueyonder.co.uk. Alternatively you can contact anyone on the committee (contact details on our web site: www.croydonastro.org.uk) to forward to me.

I will welcome any comments you may have.