

Altair



January 2009 Newsletter

Hello and welcome to our new newsletter; which is the first to be produced since 1999.

A lot has happen since then. The internet and email have grown in importance, leading to greater availability of information, from these sources. One of the major problems we have found is the lack of volunteers to edit Altair.

Altair was originally a record of what happened within the society. This newsletter will look at future and recent events held by the society.

Many other societies have continued their magazine or newsletter; which we have unfortunately been unable to produce. It is for this reason why I decided to edit the newsletter over the next few months, with the hope of finding a permanent editor. .

International Year of Astronomy

This year is an important year for astronomy. As I am sure most of you are aware, it will be the four hundredth anniversary, of the first use of the telescope; which was said to have been invented in 1608, by a Dutch spectacle maker Johannes (Hans) Lipperhey, from Middelburg. He applied to patent "a certain instrument to see far". Lipperhey demonstrated his invention to Prince Maurice in The Hague. Despite enthusiasm for his invention and several orders to build such devices for customers, no patent was awarded to Lipperhey, because his instrument could have already been known to others.

It is believed that first recorded observations were made by an English astronomer, Thomas Harriot, in August 1609, who observed the moon. However it was another who made the telescope famous.

Galileo developed the refracting telescope, and in October or November 1609, discovered the Jovian moons. The realisation that the moons orbited Jupiter resulted in a fundamental change in our understanding of the Solar System. No longer was the Earth at the centre of the Solar System. The Earth was demoted to a planet orbiting the Sun.

In celebration of this; The International Astronomical Union, declared 2009, International Year of Astronomy (IYA 2009). There will be many events held up and down the country including within the Southern Group of Astronomical Societies (SAGAS) area. Details can be found on either SAGAS website or the IYA website. There are links on our website.

We are planning to hold an event in central Croydon, however we are still waiting for the council to reply.

Lectures this month

Our lecture programme starts on Friday 9th January, at the Royal Russell School, at 7.45pm.

Friday, 9th January

Several members will be talking to us on various astronomical subjects which begin with the letter K. The subjects covered will be, Kelvin, Jacobus Cornelius Kapteyn - The Man, His Discoveries and his legacy from a star to Dr Who and Kuiper.

Friday 23 January (Change to the programme)

Nik Szymanek will be talking to us "Photographing the Night Sky". This will be your chance to learn about astro imaging, or just enjoy the images.

We hope that Konrad Malin Smith's, lecture will be held on 6th February.

Main Astronomical Events in January

1st - Jupiter and Mercury are in conjunction. This should be an interesting early evening site, as there will be a crescent Moon and Venus, nearby. Look South West around 16:45 UT.

3rd - Quadrantids Meteor Shower will be at its maximum peak.

10th – Moon at perigee. The Moon, Castor and Pollux form a triangle

11th – Full Moon

23rd – Moon at apogee, whilst Venus and Uranus are in conjunction.

29rd – Crescent Moon to the right of Uranus

30th – Around 11:00UT a crescent Moon and Venus should be observable using binoculars.

If you take any images 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 or our website.

Observing Workshop

Our next observing workshop will be Saturday 10 January at 20:30UT. We are going to have a closer look at binoculars. What to buy and not as the case may be. We will also look at observing logs. If clear we will do some more observing, and learning how to use a goto telescope.

SAGAS Star Party

Please do not forget that there is a starparty, being held on the Isle of Wight, between 26th and 30th March. Details can be found on the SAGAS website at: - www.sagasonline.org.uk .

Bookings for the campsite and ferry's are now being taken. There are also local B & B's available.

Visits by Groups

Over the next few months, there will be several visits to the Norman Fisher Observatory, Kenley, on Friday's and Saturday's. This will mean that the observatory will open around 21:00 UT. It is best to ring the observatory on 020 8668 9642, around 19:00 UT, to check the opening time.

We are need of volunteers to help with visits. The typically, start around 19:30 to 20:00 UT and last around an hour and half. Don't worry that have not got an experience straight away. We never throw people in at the deep end, until they have gained some experience.

Norman Fisher Observatory, Kenley

The observatory will continue to be open on Friday's we are not at the Royal Russell School (members), and Saturday's for the public. Usually we will open around 20:30 UT, unless there is a group visit. Please ring the observatory.

Using your donations, we recently purchased new dew heater, a laser pointer holder for the telescope, an overhead projector and computer peripherals.

The dew heater helps, however we are experiencing problems with the secondary mountings, causing condensation in the centre.

In the coming month we hope to purchase a new digital projector for the observatory. We would like to thank Barry Cheasely for his cash donation, towards the purchase.

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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.

Information on the Acting Editor



You may not realise I wear several hats. Chairman is not my only job. You may not realise that I am the Outreach Secretary, responsible for visits to the observatory by groups like scouts, guides, schools and other adult groups, This also means I visit them as well.

My other duties include the lecture programme and now acting editor of Altair newsletter.

I have been interested in astronomy since I was 8, but more seriously in the last 12 years. I joined the society in 1997, and was elected to the committee in 1999.

My main interest is observational astronomy, with binoculars and my Mead ETX 105PE, but always making use of the facilities at the observatory. This does not stop me getting involved with imaging. David Burfoot (assistant tea boy), Steve Sumner (Observatory Manager) and myself, often visit Kenley trying to take images.

I am also a member of the Society of Popular Astronomy and South Lincolnshire Astronomical & Geophysical Society.

Most of my dark sky observing takes place on my sister's farm in North Cornwall, where there is virtually no light pollution.

I would be grateful if members would leave some feedback on the newsletter. If you would like to volunteer, to edit Altair, please contact me.

Contact me either by emailing, chairman07@croydonastro.org.uk ; or alternatively ring on 020 8251 9455 (evenings and weekends).