



Welcome to the Christmas edition of the Dumfries Astronomy Society Newsletter...

This is the first time in my life I have ever assumed the role of editor of anything, let alone a publication that could be read by the public!

It's Christmas time if you hadn't noticed already so you will find the odd 'snippet' here and there for light entertainment as well as the usual 'What's On' and 'What's Happened' sort of stuff you would expect to see.

Your contributions are welcome, as I need your input to keep this going and give us all something of interest to read which is just a bit different from what you will see in the astronomy magazines down at the newsagents. This month's effort has been put together quickly with what I had to hand. In the months ahead between us we can generate ideas to create regular features and news updates. Let me know what you want to see...

Alwyn Howes – *Acting Editor*

Society Meetings and Lectures

All meetings detailed below will be held at St George's Church Hall, George Street, Dumfries. The hall will be available from 7:00 p.m. If you would like directions to the hall or have any enquiries about any event get in touch with one of the contacts at the end of this newsletter.

21 December 05 - **Astronomical Software & Quiz**

An open evening with reviews of astronomical software and a quiz. There was also a rumour of visiting the pub, which is within walking distance of the meeting hall...

25 January 05 – **So You Want Your Own Observatory?**

From rough sketches and thoughts to design and build – the speaker will take you through the project planning and construction of a home observatory built on a secret location in Dumfries and Galloway!

22 February 05 - **Theoretical Physics Without the Equations**

A very special speaker, Dr Eduard Kontar of the University of Glasgow will be presenting an unusual approach to a normally difficult subject for any normal person to get to grips with. He will add his own special Ukrainian eccentricity to theoretical physics. This talk will be a lot of fun – so make sure you don't miss it.

22 March 05 -? **Watch this space...?**

Content still to be decided but put a provisional note in your diaries. See www.astronomers.ukscientists.com for the latest news or contact one of the club committee members nearer the time. See contact details at the end of this newsletter.



Restless Stars



Dumfries Astronomy Club hosted a special talk on 16 November entitled 'Restless Stars.'

Bonnie Steves who had made a special journey from Glasgow Caledonian University delivered an excellent presentation. If you were not there – you really missed a treat!

Restless Stars was the story and mathematics of how stars gravitationally interact with each other. Computer simulations were used to demonstrate how the forces of attraction between different stars interact.

Bonnie presented what is a very complex subject in a simple and entertaining way that all those present managed to follow.

We wish her and her team well in the future work they do and hope one day she can come back and give us an update on the latest research.



After eating his first meal on the moon, the astronaut reported, "The food was good, but the place lacked atmosphere."

Copernicus' parents overheard saying to their son:

"Copernicus, young man, when are you going to come to terms with the fact that the world does not revolve around you?"

Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), a Polish astronomer, who established in his writings the Copernican system, the first modern European theory of planetary motion, that placed the sun motionless at the center of the solar system, with all the planets, including the earth, revolving around it.





The images above of Jupiter and Saturn were taken with a Phillips Web Cam, fitted with an eyepiece adapter and Meade LX10, eight inch Schmidt Cassegrain.

Each image was based on using software to average some 20 images to minimise the effects of seeing. The rings of Saturn are clearly visible and with a little imagination one can make out the main ring division. Jupiter shows its bands nicely and one can make out a moon and its shadow on the planet's surface.

Note: best viewed at arm's length!



Send Us Your Images

One often finds those with an interest in astronomy also possess keen interest in photography. The combined interests become 'astrophotography,' the art of taking pictures in the dark.

Astrophotography can almost be considered something of a black art (sorry they don't get any better do they) as we wander out in the night trying to capture images of objects we cannot see let alone try and get into focus.

Then there are fingers that go numb on shutter buttons and batteries that go numb as well. Dew adds interesting patterns onto our images, so do passing aircraft and nearer to ground, passing cars.....!

Dogged perseverance and buckets of patience does pay off in the end though. Whether you use film or digital methods the rewards can be very personal as you steadily build skill and your images improve.

In forthcoming issues it would be nice to see and hear what members get up to in this very interesting area of our hobby.

Tell us what your experience has taught you, what tips you have picked up from friends, reading and the Internet.

And best of all send the editor examples of what you have achieved to share with other members.

(Ed.)



Wanted

Images old or new to be published in the Newsletter. Email or post any images you have to the editor for publication in the coming months...

Sherlock Holmes is known to have said:

"It's a capital mistake to theorise before you have all the evidence."

It follows that astronomers are bad detectives!

Interested in weather whether you will be able to see anything tonight? Try these...

www.met-office.gov.uk/weather/europe/uk/swscotland.html

www.dcs.lancs.ac.uk/iono/aurorawatch/

www.spacew.com/www/aurora.html



Living on Earth may be expensive, but it includes an annual free trip around the Sun!



The following letter was received from Bill Ward, the President of the Scottish Astronomers Group:



I am writing to ask that you please copy and circulate this to the members of your astronomical society.

Dear Secretary/Member,

The Scottish Astronomers Group (SAG) exists as an organisation to promote astronomy across Scotland, to encourage the reporting of astronomical observations and to act as a national forum for astronomical societies and active observers. The Group initially had the aim of coordinating observing campaigns, for example, of meteors and aurorae. Over the past few years such activities have declined with fewer and fewer people contributing observations.

At the last AGM of the Group I presented a short talk which was the result of a brief personal survey of astronomical societies. This was an attempt to find out what their involvement with the Group was, both through contacting the secretary of the society and/or through personal conversations with members. I did not receive that much feed back and those responses I did receive seemed to show that it was felt that the Group did not appear to be doing anything different from what was already being done at a local level. I hope this impression will change! The Group is not a society in the conventional sense. It is the chance to get together with observers from across the country that makes the Group distinctive.

The Group has been around for over twenty years and I have been involved for around thirteen years however this is my first appointment as an official. In that time I have attended many excellent meetings and have seen some remarkable observations which show, despite our less than helpful weather, just what can be seen in the night sky. Modern technology has made possible observations, which were only dreamt of a few years ago BUT the some of the best work is still done with nothing more than ones eyes, a pencil and a piece of paper!

Scotland has many well-organised and well-attended astronomical societies. I would very much like to see, either by individuals or as a group effort through the society, your observations, your pictures, what events you have planned and ANYTHING else astronomy related that you are involved in. The Group is an opportunity to promote your society and your observations to the wider astronomical community in Scotland. Group meetings are open to all. Most astronomical societies are already affiliated to the Group and this means that ANY member of ANY affiliated society is welcome to come along to ANY Group meeting and participate fully no matter where that particular meeting is held. If you have something to show come along! Society reports and members contributions are the essence of Group. Visitors and guests are equally welcome. Any material received will be used in our newsletter, which is distributed to all members and affiliated societies.

Please consider submitting whatever you can and perhaps also consider hosting a Group meeting.

Thank you very much for your help and continuing support. I look forward to meeting you at future meetings of the Scottish Astronomers Group. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

...and finally...

Jupiter came down to earth one day and decided to help these two criminals to rob a bank. Anyway, to make a long story short, they got caught and the three of them found themselves in court. The judge sentenced the two earthlings to fifteen years, and Jupiter was a bit shocked when he was sentenced to ten years.

"But" said Jupiter, "I didn't even take part in the robbery!"

"Yes" said the judge. "But you helped them ... Planet!"

Your Contacts



President	Mark Toner	01387 252 674	mark@spacepod.info
Chairman	Mansour Gemie	01387 267 777	mansourgemie@hotmail.com
Secretary	Klaus Schiller	01387 269 762	lesley.burrell@btinternet.com
Librarian	Neil Booker	01387 870 667	neil@astronomy.ndo.co.uk
Web Site	James Foster	01387 247 357	jfoster@sidewind.u-net.com
Editor	Alwyn Howes	01387 723213	akhowes@beeb.net
Treasurer	Hugh Waugh	01387 268 508	

