Sagittarius

The Newsletter of the Astronomy Section of La Société Guernesiaise

April – June 2007

Forthcoming Events

Public Lecture:

Professor David Hughes:
"Killer Asteroids and the Bombardment of Planet Earth"

18th April: 8.30 pm
Duke of Richmond Hotel
(Dinner at cost of £16.95 at 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm)

Public Open Evenings:

24th April – 8.30 pm

22nd May – 9.00 pm

In addition, the Section meets at the Observatory every Tuesday evening, and Friday if clear for observing.

Inside

Inserts

Star chart

Sunset, sunrise, moonset and moonrise times

Minutes of the Astronomy Section AGM 2007

(held at the Observatory, Rue de Lorier, St Peters on Tuesday 23rd January 2007 at 8 pm)

Present: Colin Spicer, Peter Langford, Frank Dowding, Geoff Falla, Jessica Harris, David Le Conte and Debby Quertier

1. Apologies There were no apologies for absence.

2. Election of Officers
The following were elected as officers of the section:

Colin Spicer Editor
Peter Langford Treasurer
David Le Conte Public Relations
Geoff Falla Facilities
Frank Dowding Research
Debby Quertier Secretary

Jessica Harris informed the meeting that she was resigning as joint secretary with effect from the La Societe Guernesiaise AGM on 20th March. Jessica would advise La Societe President, Charles David of her decision.

A vote of thanks was given to Jessica on behalf of the Astronomy Section for her valuable contribution over the last 8 years.

3. Treasurer's Report
The Treasurer noted that subscriptions and fund raising income was a little down on the previous year. There were 7 fewer members in 2006 than in the previous year. Fund raising mostly from donations from public viewing evenings had been hampered by cloudy skies and resultant low attendance.

However, since expenditure was also lower, income exceeded expenditure by £300. The total funds available to the Section at the year end was £3,000.

Costs for the production and mailing of Sagittarius and Astro Calendars had only just been covered by subscriptions over the last two years. It was agreed that the membership fee would be increased from 2008 to:

£6 for a single membership (was £5)
£10 for couples (was £8) and family (unchanged)
£3 for OAPs and juniors (unchanged)

The meeting thanked the Treasurer for his report.

4. Dehumidifier
It was agreed that the dehumidifier was at the end of its useful life and that a new one should be purchased. Frank Dowding agreed to investigate models available and costs.

5. Roof Leakage
Water had been coming through the roof during the recent periods of heavy rainfall and the ceiling had black mould in places. It was agreed that Debby Quertier would contact

the landlord regarding repairs. It was noticed that the plasterboard ceiling could be damaged and may need repair but all present agreed that this should be looked at once the necessary repairs to the external roof were complete.

6. Any Other Business

Colin Spicer advised that a new computer was needed in the Main Building for demonstrations but this should only be considered once the roof problems were fixed.

The meeting agreed that we should do more observing ourselves, in particular come up with ideas for research projects as we spend a lot of effort for others in group and public viewing evenings.

David Le Conte advised that repairs were needed to the Meade building where new runners were needed for the roof. The material would be purchased and the repairs done when the weather permitted, possibly in the spring.

In order to minimise hazards from trailing cables a longer USB cable would be purchased for the webcam (approximately £20.00) which could be routed under the floor in the Meade building.

The merits of an additional computer screen for the Main Building which could be linked to images from the telescope/webcam were discussed. A larger screen would be considered once purchase of a new computer is agreed.

It was agreed to move the large cabinet in the main building and also to dispose of the old computer hardware. Colin Spicer will check whether Galaxy Computers accept old PCs for recycling.

It was agreed that it was not now necessary to get a gate at the car park as there was no longer a problem with fouling dogs.

It was agreed that we would ask for donations towards running costs on open evenings rather than specifying a suggested donation. We will review the success of this approach. We will aim to collect donations as people leave rather than on entry.

Frank Dowding raised the question of having specific observing projects to make the full use of our excellent equipment. We would investigate this through specialist sections of the BAA ie on BAA website. Variable stars were considered as a topic but would require expert observing skills. We should continue to improve our own skills and widen our knowledge of the sky. A further suggestion for a project was to locate the Sky and Telescope top 100 moon sites. These might be captured photographically using the webcam.

Debby Quertier agreed to organise binders for the WEA handout sheets.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.35pm.

Debby Quertier

The Lunar Eclipse of 3rd March 2007

The partially eclipsed Moon. Photograph by David Le Conte

The total eclipse of the Moon on Saturday, 3rd March was probably seen by as many people in Guernsey as had ever watched such an event. It was at a very convenient time, and was given much publicity in the media. Lots of people have spoken to me about it.

About a dozen members of the Astronomy Section, and a few others, observed the eclipse from the Observatory. We had decided not to open for the public, as we feared that we might be swamped with visitors, and as people could in any case see it from anywhere.

We were, however, delighted that His Excellency The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Fabion Malbon, took the opportunity to accept our invitation to visit the Observatory, together with Lady Malbon and his Secretary, Richard Graham and his wife.

We had excellent views of the eclipse from its commencement at 9.30 pm to about 11.30 pm, when cloud intervened. By then, however, totality was mostly completed, and we had taken the chance to have telescopic views of a few deep sky objects, such as the Orion Nebula. Saturn also, of course, put on a good show, and Sir Fabion was particularly pleased as he had never seen it through a telescope.

I obtained a few photographs of the partial phase using a 500-1000 mm zoom lens on a Canon digital SLR camera, but none of totality as I was too busy with visitors. Frank Dowding did, however, obtain some excellent video footage of the eclipse, which, no doubt, he will incorporate in his compilation of Astronomy Section video records.

A Guernsey Press photographer also attended and obtained photographs, not just of the general scene and individuals, but also of the totally eclipsed Moon itself, using a 400-mm focal length lens on a digital camera, obtaining some excellent results, one of which appeared on the cover of the next day's Press.

The Press, incidentally, had managed to stir up what it referred to as a controversy about what colour the eclipsed Moon would appear. Michael Maunder in Alderney had postulated that it might appear grey or blue because of dust in the Earth's atmosphere caused by winds in the Gobi desert, while I stood by the usual account that it would be red because of refraction and filtering of sunlight through the Earth's atmosphere, the blue light being scattered out. This had the effect of gaining people's attention, and ensuring that more than ever were determined to judge for themselves by observing the eclipse.

In the event, the eclipse did appear darker than recent ones have been, although some of this may have been due to increasing hazy cloud cover. While the lighter areas did look red (and most people I spoke to afterwards confirmed that it was generally red), the darker parts were more indeterminate, verging on grey. And Geoff Falla, who was manning the 11-inch Celestron, pointed out that through the telescope the red colour could not be distinguished, the overall impression being grey.

In summary, it was a very successful eclipse, and the advent of cloud after the main show was over, ensured that we were not tempted to stay out too late after all.

The next total lunar eclipse visible from Guernsey will be on 21 February 2008, starting at 1.43 in the morning.

David Le Conte

'Twere Modest Blue

We all know how the "Media" just love to take an ordinary statement and convert it into something sensational. So it was with my article in the Alderney Journal about a Blue Moon.

What I was trying to do in that article was drum up some support for an event with Alderney Wildlife Trust, where the public could take part in this special event. I chose the 'Blue Moon' analogy for two reasons. First because the headline was eye catching and likely to be read, second because of the rarity of the dark ones.

What the Press published implied that I was predicting a blue Moon, no less, rather than what I took care to say was likely to be a grey event. Those of you reading Sagittarius will be only too well aware of the apparent disagreement between David and myself, when in fact 'twere none. So

how did all this arise and get blown out of proportion?
Like my interest in Geoff's research, I'd taken a great deal of interest in atmospheric phenomena as far as they affect everyday sightings. In this case there was a direct link between astronomy and the weather and atmospheric phenomena on the other side of the globe.

Where the apparent disagreement mainly lies is in what we were predicting. Nobody, as far as I'm aware had made any on the lunar brightness and I'd done that in saying it was going to be much darker than normal. In that I was fully vindicated.

If we go back to my thinking it all starts with the weather close to sunrise, and that's in the Far East around our local 23.00-midnight. For my book I'd noted that China has had unprecedented sandstorms for years, decades even, and that has led to dunes appearing right outside the Chinese City of Beijing. The Gobi is definitely on the move- but that's nothing new and has been going on for millennia. I stuck my neck out and wrote the article, predicting a dark eclipse.

My theory was supported a day or so before the eclipse, some fortnight after submitting the article, when I noted an interesting snippet on Teletext. The sandstorms had evolved to such an extent that a whole train of 11 carriages had been blown over! I also knew that the weather in USA at that time was freezing and heavily clouded, around the other side of the globe where sunset occurred.
Another crucial factor in my prediction was a study of our own weather patterns. For some weeks we'd had the torrential rain and gales that seemed to go on forever. But, and that's the crunch in predicting a blue Moon, there were just the right conditions brewing to see one. The right sort of ice crystals in the upper atmosphere. These were seen as halos round the sun by day and round the Moon at night. Again, that prediction came exactly right and many readers will have seen these effects before the eclipse and immediately afterwards as the clouds came across. The bright halo as the lunar light increased was most striking just after midnight. I predicted heavy rain and gales to follow that, and it did, as often the case.

The Danjon Scale of Lunar Eclipse brightness is as follows and note the colour descriptions used:

0 Very dark eclipse. Moon practically invisible at mid-eclipse.
1 Dark grey, or brownish eclipse. Surface features difficult to make out.
2 Dark red or ruddy eclipse., frequently with a large dark patch at the centre of the umbra.
3,4 (what most others predicted) Brick to bright coppery red.

Thus my main prediction was for a Danjon 1 or 2, as I also knew that immediately after solar minimum, lunar eclipses are (normally) darker

than average. Another effect of the Sun on the atmosphere now largely attributed to Man's Global Warming.

'Official' initial results indicated 2.3, so not too bad!

So where does a blue moon come from? We all know the American usage and that doesn't need to be repeated here. It is possible to see a truly blue Moon whenever the muck in the atmosphere, or the ice crystals has the right shape, size and disposition. Conditions that were building up here, on the Islands, a day or so before the mainland UK. Much of this derives from 1942 work in Paris during WW2 where the spectroscopic studies indicted the importance of atmospheric clarity and composition (ozone et al) at different altitudes during the eclipse at the same time of year, on March 2, in fact.

Although not uncommon, their rarity lies in coinciding with a lunar eclipse. Such an event was seen in 1950 in America on September 25. That was shortly after a volcanic eruption, the normal cause of dust that cuts out the red and shows a blue or even a green moon. On that occasion the moon went purple due to the combined (normal) red with the blue. Very dark lunar eclipses occurred in 1884 and 1888 some years after Krakatoa, and in 1902. Katmai, another brake on global warming, dramatically affected that of 1913.

For March 3, I knew of a similar effect that wasn't due to volcanism, but another increasingly common atmospheric pollutant this time of year. Forest burning in Indonesia and other countries in our twilight zone.

Again I seem to have got that right as only in the last week, two weeks after the eclipse, the press was full of the severe health warnings being issued in that part of the world. We've seen this for a decade or more, now, and even Athens has a regular problem from car exhaust. The atmospheric conditions to produce a dark eclipse, together with a bluing are increasingly common. On that I do have to disagree with reports attributed to David.

The final confirmation that the unusual conditions were right was in seeing a corona round the setting Venus and hour or so before eclipse started.

I rest my case.

Michael Maunder

Geoff Falla's regular roundup of articles from popular Astronomy and Space Journals

Does Antimatter Matter? The collision of matter and antimatter particles produces bursts of gamma rays. Although there seems to be a lack of antimatter particles around us in the galaxy, NASA's Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory has found a

huge region near the centre of our galaxy where hot gas and a jet of antimatter is being ejected. (Astronomy, December 2006)

Zeroing in on Martian Water The NASA spacecraft Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter reached the planet in March 2006, with radar equipment to detect water at a depth of several thousand feet. This will help in the further search for areas where life is more likely to be found. (Astronomy, December 2006)

Seeding Life in the Solar System. Life on Earth may have developed from organisms coming from elsewhere in space, -the process known as panspermia. There is evidence that some microbes can survive the harsh conditions in space, and it is also thought that such material from Earth ejected by large impacts may have travelled out to other planets and moons. (Sky and Telescope, January 2007)

The Moon's Far Side. The Moon's far side has been almost forgotten during space missions to other planets and moons. The Clementine lunar orbit mission of 1994 obtained a complete photo-mosaic of the far side showing some unique features very different to the familiar Earth-facing side.
(Sky and Telescope, January 2007)

Top 10 Astronomy Stories of 2006. 'The most significant events and discoveries of 2006 include passing the 200 mark in the discovery of planets around other stars, the first return of comet trail material to Earth for study (from Comet Wild 2) and the arrival- of the European spacecraft Venus Express into orbit around the planet. (Astronomy, January 2007)

Supernova 1987A - Twenty Years on. On February 24th, 1987, a supernova explosion was observed in the region of the Large Magellanic Cloud, one of our Milky Way's attendant dwarf galaxies. It was 400 years since the previous nearby stellar explosion, and it enabled astronomers to find out more about these rare events. (Astronomy Now, February 2007)

The Local Group of Galaxies. A look at the neighbourhood of our own Milky Way Galaxy. A set of articles describing the local group, which includes the Andromeda Galaxy M31, the smaller M33 Triangulum Galaxy, and dwarf galaxies including the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds. (Astronomy Now, February 2007.)

Water on Mars. Just a few years ago, it was thought that water may have flowed on Mars a few million years ago. Evidence from recent photographs now suggests that occasional water flows are a reality at the present time. (Astronomy Now, February 2007)

Ringworld Revelations. Since the Cassini spacecraft obtained the first close range images of Saturn in 2004, its rings have been studied in detail, to find out how they may have formed. The other giant gas-covered planets in our solar system have faint ring

systems, but only those of Saturn are large and bright - as wide as the Earth to Moon distance, yet only a few metres thick. (Sky and Telescope, February 2007)

Colour in Astronomy. Normal vision allows us to see a range of electro-magnetic wavelengths as colour. How filters are used to produce accurate colour rendering in CCD images, and other processes including enhanced colour used to produce Hubble Space Telescope images. (Astronomy Now, March 2007)

Volcanoes of the Solar System. Some of the major volcanic sites on the solar system's planets and moons, including the largest - on Mars, and the volcanic activity of Jupiter's moon Io, caused by huge gravitational effects. (Astronomy Now, March 2007)

Decoding the Antikythera Mechanism. A bronze mechanical device made over 2,000 years ago, and recovered from a sunken ship, has recently been examined in more detail using X-ray imaging. This has revealed that the multi-geared mechanism was used as an astronomical calculator, and is the most advanced device from the ancient world that has ever been found.
(Astronomy Now, March 2007)

Supernova Blast from the Past. During the Earth's history there have been five 'mass extinction' events, identified from fossil records. The. examination of radioactive isotopes from the Pacific seabed has confirmed a supernova explosion at a distance of only about 100 light years, during the Pliocene age of early man, but anything more dangerous at closer range would be a very rare event. (Sky and Telescope, March 2007)

Cosmic Code Breakers. Joseph Fraunhofer obtained the first spectrum of light from the Sun in 1814. The use of spectrometers, and how the spectra of light from celestial objects provides astronomers with a ‘fingerprint' to identify chemical elements and to understand the processes at work.
(Sky and Telescope, March 2007)

Dark Matter or Gravity Variation? Does dark matter really exist, as accepted by most astronomers? Or perhaps the theory of gravity will need revision as some astronomers suggest, to explain the rotation of galaxies. This should be settled if dark matter particles are identified. (Sky and Telescope, April 2007)

Comet McNaught. This comet was judged to be the brightest in 41 years, but it was on far better view from more southern latitudes, and even became visible in daylight. (Sky and Telescope, April 2007)

1843 and all that.

Geoff Falla's article in the last Sagittarius, pages 9-15 is absolutely fascinating and prompted me to write something about the (then) imminent lunar eclipse of March 3. I'll cover that particular story in another article as the two effects, as in 1843, led to a lot of "Press" speculation, much with little scientific basis. The two topics do have some relationship.

The first thing that stands out is the simple logic that whatever the light in the sky was, or might have been, a link with an earthquake two days apart is highly unlikely. As Geoff goes on to review, there are plenty of records of earthquakes in SE England and right down through the Cherbourg Peninsular. I recall many reports of these over the years and Kent does seem to be a hot-spot. For my money, that research is quite separate and distinct from "Lights in the Sky".

By sheer coincidence, I'd just finished a book with that title, due to appear from Springer around the time this issue of Sagittarius appears. A number of possible explanations for the sighting(s) were possible and here are a few.

The first aspect is that we can rule out volcanism, or can we? It's well known that electric storms are a regular feature at a volcanic eruption, very similar to a normal thunderstorm, but without the rain and rain clouds. I've only seen one of these and included it as an example in the book. In December of 1975, Transolar Travel (before Explorers) ran a trip to Tenerife with the idea of climbing Teide. Although my wife, Wendy and I didn't make it in the freezing cold, fog and snow, some did. That volcano is quite active, but the picture I took around that time was of a much more spectacular electric storm on the horizon, with Orion as backdrop.

Checking later the origin was quite clearly La Palma and as we all know that volcano is due to erupt sometime and send much of the Island into the sea. The resulting Tsunami will dwarf anything the recent Sumatran one did and Guernsey's Western coastline will not survive anything projected to protect from (Climate Change) sea level rise. What is significant in this sighting is the quite obvious one that around that time surveys were being made to site the UK's Observatory, and a few years later that happened. What price that site will experience another volcanic eruption immediately underneath it?

Guernsey isn't close to any known active volcanoes but the Irish Sea and similar places around the UK do harbour seismic activity of the type experienced in 1843. The terrible Tsunami that struck the Severn hinterland in the early 1600's was the subject of a recent TV programme.

If we rule out volcanism as the light source, what else? An electric storm is another candidate on the list. We call that phenomenon today "Ball Lightning". The first surprise is that it is not at all uncommon and has been recorded for a very long time, with an average of up to a thousand a day!

We can discount anything arising from electrical power as that wasn't known in those days and recent reports (2005/6) of these coming to visit people in houses often arise from the huge currents developed when domestic machinery, such as a freezer, is switched on and off. This type of ball lightning often stays still for a similar period to the 1843 description and cannot be ruled out as a candidate in the open air where most often seen. Colour is not very common and rapid movement likewise. However, that can move very quickly and lead to horrendous burns and might be associated with noises and explosions.

Guernsey's history is extremely interesting with more than a single Island, with lots of marsh land in the north west. A fertile area of research will be to check on "Will-o-the-Wisp" and similar. With so much rotting vegetation, maybe lots of drowned animals, phosphorescent phenomena are another possibility. December in those days would have been very cold and the mid-1800s a period of intense hardship.

But that holds in itself a vital clue, in my opinion - because I do believe in Father Christmas!

An origin of the Father Christmas legend, from around this time too, comes from the same atmospheric conditions we see extremely often around these Islands. The same thing that led to the Arthurian Legend of Fata Morgana, where the images of the people rose up and flew around, similar to reindeer flying with and without castles in the air.

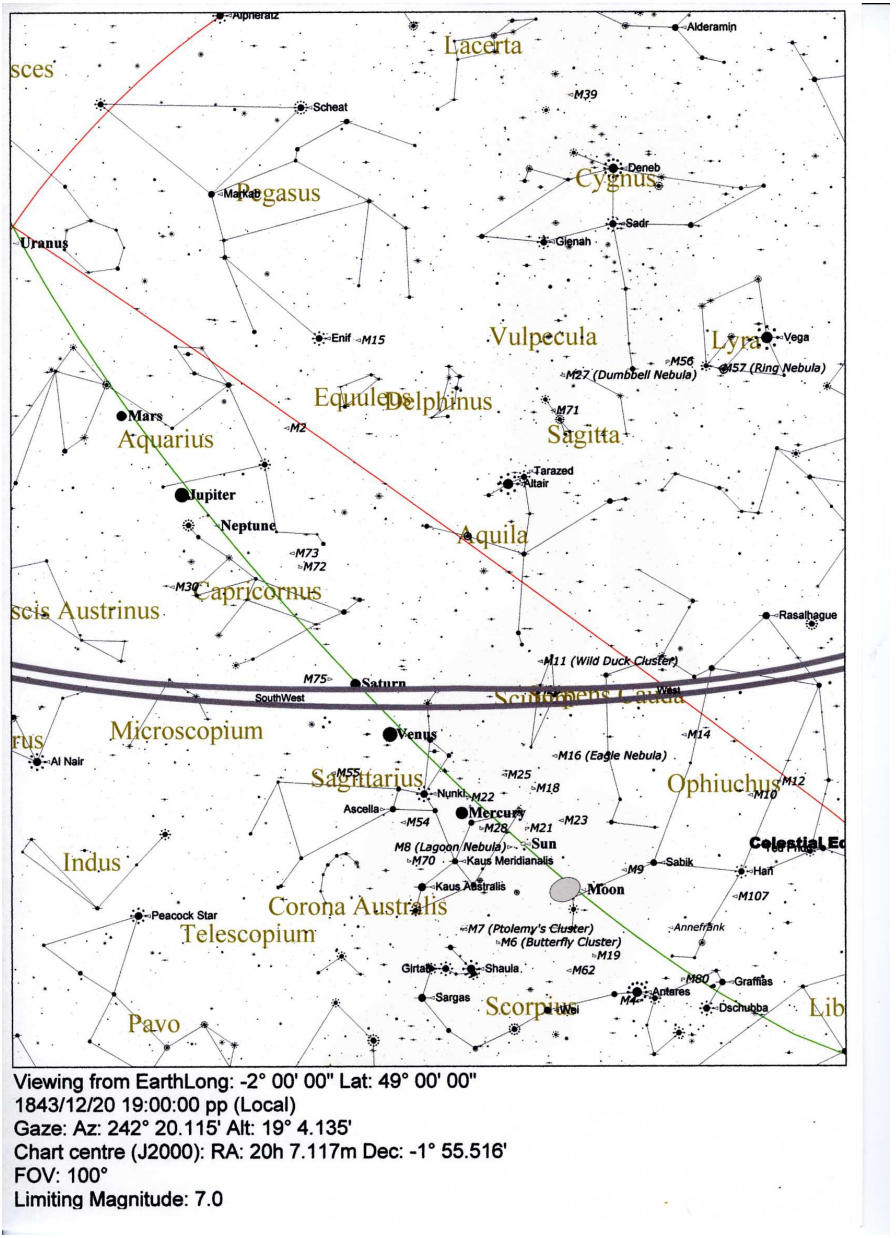
OK, I joke not because a very similar atmospheric condition led to the fiasco over the Canadian North West Passage and I quote from my book:

"John Ross set out in 1818 to find the Northwest Passage but turned back when he found the way blocked by mountains. A second attempt by others a year later found absolutely nothing in the way. This mirage was such a familiar event locally that the Inuit even had a word for it-"Poojok" which translates into mist. This makes a great deal of sense because similar sightings in Europe have been reported after a hot day when looking out over the cold sea with a lifting mist.

Later in the century in 1897 similar sightings in Alaska of a city in the air were reported in reputable British Journals. The thinking at the time was of Montreal or Toronto, almost as far away from Alaska as London from those two cities!

This type of mirage does have a name, Novaya Zemlya mirage, derived from the first scientific description. In that case the light from hundreds of

miles/km away was bent round the surface of the earth. It can appear to come from somewhere up to 10 degrees below the actual horizon.



The classic example of this occurred at night. That was the sighting in New Zealand of Venus. Over a period of more than 10 days in December of 1978, the planet was seen and filmed from that far below the horizon. The planet wasn't due to rise for the best part of an hour later."

The interesting thing here is that I wrote all this some months before the Sagittarius appeared. We're very familiar with a hot weather sighting of green flashes, another form of mirage called an Inferior Mirage, but what we have in 1843 seems to be the opposite form, the Superior Mirage with intensely cold air sitting at ground level.

So, is Venus a candidate as in 1978? Absolutely, it seems if you check on the skies at that time. Venus had just set and was perfectly situated for a Novaya Zemlya event. Saturn is about to set and could be seen at an elevated position and is bright enough in dark skies of those days to be noticed. But Venus would be "Brilliant" and spectacularly prominent.

The sky at that time is shown in the figure together with the supporting data below.

Sun sets	16.10
End of Civil Twilight	16.48
End of Nautical twilight	17.29
Venus sets	17.32
End of Astronomical twilight	18.09
Saturn sets	18.15
Jupiter sets	20.56

What do you think of that explanation?

Michael Maunder

Mechanics Institute Lectures

The building which houses the Guille-Allès Library in Market Square has a venerable history, having been the Assembly Rooms, the Island Museum, the home of the choral and orchestral society, and of course the birthplace of La Société Guernesiaise. It was, however, also the meeting place of the Mechanics Institute, which was established in the 19th century to promote the education of the working class.

The Library's archives retain a large ledger recording Tuesday public lectures given by the Institute. It

contains not just the title of the lecture and the name of the presenter, but also the number who attended, the number who paid (others presumably being exempt because of their pecuniary circumstances), and those who had paid extra to sit in the best seats. The lecture series lasted from 1890 to 1914, when it must have been cut off by the advent of the Great War.

The lectures covered a wide range of topics, including literature, natural history, travel experiences, and the physical and chemical sciences. A number of them, mostly given by a Mr A Collenette, FCS (Fellow of the Chemical Society?) were astronomical, and many seem to have been well attended. Indeed, the highest number of attendees which I could find recorded was over 300 for a lecture about Comet Halley's Comet appearance in 1910. That lecture was published in full in *The Star* over four issues (21, 23, 26 and 30 April 1910).

The following is a list of the astronomical lectures, the presenters and (in brackets) the numbers attending. Some of the titles, especially the first one, reflect the interests and beliefs of the day. Does any reader know who Mr Collenette was?

21 October 1890 A Collenette: *The Planet Mars: its Lands, Seas, Canals and Inhabitants*. (270)

25 October 1892 A Collenette: *Mars up-to-date*. (79)

14 March 1893 A Collenette: *The Moon, its Mountains, Craters, etc., as seen in the great Telescopes of the Day*. (190)

27 February 1894. Albert T Davis: *Astronomy: the Solar System*. (112)

5 March 1895. A Collenette: *Unseen Stars and Worlds*. (70)

26 February 1901. Francis Holiday: *The Probable Past and Future of our Solar System*. (53)

4 February 1908. A Collenette: *Mars: Supposed stupendous works: Newest Discoveries Illustrated*. (126)

19 April 1910. A Collenette: *Halley's Comet: Its Peculiarities, Former Appearances and what we may now expect to see*. (302)

6 December 1910. A Collenette: *Distant Suns and their visible and invisible companions*. (44)

David Le Conte

According to a Greek scholar who appeared recently on a Radio 4 programme about the Antikythera mechanism, the Greek word ανθρωπος (anthropos), meaning "human", from which we get words like "anthropology", literally means "the one who sees the sky".

David Le Conte

The Old Astronomer to His Pupil

Reach me down my Tycho Brahe, I would know him when we meet,
When I share my later science, sitting humbly at his feet;
He may know the law of all things, yet be ignorant of how
We are working to completion, working on from then to now.

Pray remember that I leave you all my theory complete,
Lacking only certain data for your adding, as is meet,
And remember men will scorn it, 'tis original and true,
And the obloquy of newness may fall bitterly on you.

But, my pupil, as my pupil you have learned the worth of scorn,
You have laughed with me at pity, we have joyed to be forlorn,
What for us are all distractions of men's fellowship and smiles;
What for us the Goddess Pleasure with her meretricious smiles!

You may tell that German College that their honor comes too late,
But they must not waste repentance on the grizzly savant's fate.
Though my soul may set in darkness, it will rise in perfect light;
I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.

by Sarah Williams

Sarah Williams, an American poet, lived from 1837 to 1868.

The last two lines were used in Ian Rankin's book *Set in Darkness*, and the last line was used as an epitaph for an Astronomer-couple buried at Alleghany Observatory.

(contributed by David Le Conte)

Section News

Once again another 'bumper' edition of 16 pages! I am very grateful to the contributors and in particular to Michael Maunder for two such topical articles. One article is a response to Geoff's article in the last edition of Sagittarius "The Remarkable Guernsey 'Meteor' and Earthquake of 1843. The second contains Mike's view on the so called controversy over this month's Lunar eclipse and we are lucky to have an account by David Le Conte on the same topic.

The annual six-week "Star Gazing" course at the Observatory in February and March coordinated by the Workers Education Association is now completed. This year the course has been more fortunate with the weather than at least the previous two courses as a reasonable amount of practical observation has been possible.

We now have further details of the lecture by Professor David Hughes, who gave a lecture on comets early last year. David Hughes is a highly respected astronomer and an entertaining speaker. I attended the

comet lecture and would recommend attending this lecture.

The lecture is organised by Channel Islands Group of Professional Engineers and is entitled 'Killer Asteroids and the Bombardment of Planet Earth' and will take place at the Duke of Richmond Hotel on Wednesday 18 April 2007.

The lecture itself will be at 8.30 pm and is free to attend. The lecture is preceeded by drinks and a dinner. The cost for this is £16.95 and anyone wishing to attend should contact Russell Corbet on 244433 by Monday 16th April. The pre-dinner drinks are at 6.30 pm with dinner served at 7.00 pm. Further details are to be found on the Channel Islands Group of Professional website: www.cigpe.gg

Colin Spicer

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