

My time is up. I'm finally retiring as Chairwoman after seven enjoyable and interesting years.

A lot has happened over the last seven years including moving from the Spectrum Centre to the Green House because of increased membership (this year we have 88 members), renovating a rotating shed we use as our present observatory and now fundraising for a new observatory. We have built a telescope, we write astronomy articles for the Courier, have a newsletter, open days, break out groups, a superb website, a bigger Committee and numerous sub-committees to manage the many things we do as a Club. Our profile has been raised so that as well as schools, youth groups or other organisations contacting us to request a speaker, it seems that even the press know how to get hold of us!

New observatory

Our most ambitious project so far has to be the new observatory. We have progressed from humble beginnings of occasional observing sessions at Culloden Battlefield car park, to our rotating shed and now to our proposed observatory with the best telescope in the Highlands.

The new observatory has gone through a number of traumatic stages. It has not been as easy or as straightforward as we had hoped. A lot of time has been spent on honing the final design and to ensure we wouldn't over reach ourselves in any way. Special thanks go to Rob Nuttall for the time and effort put into the plans and to Maarten de Vries for his time spent on the new observatory.

The main features of the observatory design are:

- 6m x 4m heated control room with computer desk, internet access and disabled toilet
- Raised (concrete) platform for dome
- 3m diameter (motor driven) Pulsar Dome
- 14" Ritchey Chretien Cassegrain type telescope with full computer pointing and collimation
- Large concrete pier, going through timber deck
- 10m x 6m grass covered observation area with high wind proof fence
- Mains water and electricity from VC (metered)

We eventually decided it would be easier and faster to ask a building firm to erect the observing station for us and to buy a dome to house the telescope rather than build it ourselves. This has meant we have needed to find more funding than originally anticipated but we are not too far from our target. So far we have received funding from:

Highland 2007	£24,996
The Lottery	£ 9,893
HIE Inverness and East Highland	£ 9,000 or 15% of total costs
The Common Good Fund	£ 3,000
Private funding so far	£ 2,881

The private funding includes many of you, the members, contributing in some way perhaps through immortality by having your name inscribed on the plaque in the new observatory, perhaps by giving us a donation or simply buying a raffle ticket - it all helps and for this I would to say a huge thank you to all of you.

The Building Firm chosen for our project is Fraser and Grant Joinery.

The new observatory sub-committee of Rob, Arthur Milnes, Antony McEwan, Bill Jappy and latterly of John Gilmour and Simon Urry who replaced Maarten because he had to step down due to pressure of work, have done a tremendous amount of work, chasing funding, securing information and turning a dream into reality. Thanks to John for volunteering as Project Manager to oversee the success of the new observatory.

We are nearly there.

Present Observatory

Still going strong, surviving the weather and our use of it. Thanks to Arthur who regularly checks the battery and together with Bill Jappy, carries out any maintenance necessary although it has required very little this year. We have also acquired a large calculator for working out astronomical sums, thanks to Antony.

Thank you also to Rob who has given us refresher sessions in the use of the telescope and wrestled with the backlash that tends to afflict it.

The observing team of Maarten, Rob, Trina Shaddick, Antony, David Hughes, Bill, Alan Mumford, Les Gamble, Eric Walker, Tom Hunt and recent recruits of Rhona Fraser and John, have seen a few more clear nights over the last six months. Let's hope this trend continues! Thank you to you all and especially David who organises the evenings.

One particular balmy evening had us debating whether or not we were looking at Noctilucent clouds before it was dark enough to view Jupiter with a telescope. (They were!).

Thank you to everyone who has come along and joined in.

Gift Aid and VAT

Simon Urry has spent a lot of time looking into both Gift Aid and VAT. It has not been easy contorting his brain in all directions in order to understand this in detail but we are very grateful for all the time spent in making it clearer for us (the Committee).

Stargazey Pie

Many thanks to Antony who continues to entertain and inform us about our monthly meetings that take place in the Green House. Glad to see that so many of you do still turn up to the Club and don't just wait for the newsletter to wing its way into your inbox. In addition, Antony now writes something about what is visible each month (Highland Skies) and this is given out at the meetings as well as putting it into the newsletter.

Bingo

No, this is not now part of our activities but the Bingo crowd were taking over the Green House car park until John began putting out a notice board promising nasty things to anyone who happened to park in our car park... It worked!

Website

The number of visitors to our website has reached record levels, (20,000 a month) so that when taking the number of pages and photos we use, it costs more to rent! However, to help offset this extra cost and to raise money for the Club, we now have Google Ads and are offering advertising to businesses.

Thanks go to Antony for maintaining the website (plus the telescope advice given to anyone who asks) and Maarten and Eric for helping out.

Courier Articles

Thank you to Maarten and Antony for writing the majority of these articles - I contribute when I can. We are hoping to bring more budding authors on board so thanks to Rhona, John and Simon who have agreed to write the occasional article as well.

Talks to others

Eric, Simon, Maarten and I have been asked by schools, Brownies and a couple of clubs, including SIGMA, to give a talk. This is a great opportunity to pass on our knowledge to others.

The Meetings

We are very lucky to have a number of our own members giving talks each year and as always a lot of thanks go to them for their time and hard work in preparing these talks.

We are also lucky to be able to call on outside speakers each year some of whom can provide an extra dimension to the evening. All speakers, so far, have agreed to join in the discussion group, which has been a great opportunity to question the speaker further. Thanks to Arthur and Pat for continuing to host these discussion groups.

The equipment groups have proved very successful with a variety of topics chosen to help demystify astronomical apparatus. Thanks to Maarten, Antony, Eric and Bill Leslie for helping out with this group.

In the beginners group I have introduced different topics with information sheets to try to help lift some subjects out of the dark.

Green House

The Green House and its superb facilities provide a very comfortable and relaxing place for the meetings. We have Enterprise Northeast Trust to thank for this. Fiona continues to look after reception until 9pm, shooing any latecomers up the stairs and often sitting in on the meetings herself. She also provides us with water for tea and the computer for the talks. Thank you Fiona.

Thanks as always to Christine Clifford for greeting you at the door thrusting bits of paper at you and making sure you are signed in.

Trina occasionally appears at the door at times when Pat E. our Treasurer, is unable to attend the meetings. Thank you Trina for helping out in this way.

Along with Pat W. and Pat E., Arthur is now a regular figure at the front door greeting you with a book of raffle tickets in his hand in aid of funds for our new observatory and again at the end of the talk dishing out the raffle prizes.

Many thanks to all of you who have contributed raffle prizes as it means that all the money made can go straight into the bank. Special thanks to Allan Thorne who gave us three Astronomy Now subscriptions.

Committee

Pat W. is our Secretary who keeps the Club running smoothly by answering queries that come her way, dealing with various matters that may arise and she spends a lot of time putting together an interesting programme. She also looks after the guest speaker usually presenting him or her with a nice tea and sometimes provides accommodation as well.

Pat E. is our treasurer who deals with the money matters in the Club. She does a lot of work behind the scenes making sure that bills are paid, receipts are collected and money goes into the bank. Sometimes she has to deal with mistakes made by the Bank and occasionally has to correct invoices.

Maarten, Arthur Milnes, Eric Walker, Simon Urry and recently John Gilmour, make up the rest of the Committee together with our Junior Committee member of Arthur Fraser. After nearly six years, Maarten stepped down from the Committee because of work commitments and John Gilmour agreed to take his place. Thank you Maarten for all your hard work.

I would like to thank my Committee for the time and effort they put into the Club and for all the support they have given me over the year. Those who have served with me over the past seven years have been fantastic and I am grateful to each and every one of them.

We have a number of sub-committees.

The new observatory sub-committee has been described above.

The Media sub-committee of Maarten, Antony, Eric and I tend to the website and write Articles. Eric has taken over from Maarten as publicity officer, making sure that MFR is kept informed of our activities.

The Tea team consist of Linda Moncur, Rita Cameron, Fred and Jean Millwood and Rhona Fraser. Margie Mackintosh also helped out until she was unable to come along to the meetings. Many thanks to them for keeping us supplied with tea, coffee and biscuits.

Programme

Our programme of events this year started with the AGM in **April**. Pat Williams agreed to stay on as Secretary for another two years.

Then we watched a DVD about the Hubble Space telescope's achievements over the last 15 years. As well as being treated to some amazing HST images, we were given an explanation as to how these objects formed and how Hubble has contributed to our understanding of the Universe.

In **May** our speaker cancelled so instead we had three brave souls from the membership who each gave a short talk.

Donald Boyd spoke about the Universe from a Christian perspective. He suggested that white holes could be the origin of our Universe as they do allow creation out of nothing.

Arthur Milnes brought in a Geiger counter. He explained how it worked, what it was used for and was even able to give a demonstration.

Lastly, Rhona Fraser told of her adventures in pursuing a Solar eclipse on an organised tour. It didn't quite go as planned and her camera didn't work but the spectacle of the eclipse, eclipsed all the difficulties.

What glorious weather for a barbecue! **June** proved the right month for Simon's yearly event kindly held at his house. Populated by a number of Society members, some of whom had fun holding the chickens, it was much enjoyed by all. Many thanks to Simon, his wife Tracey and their two offspring, Peter and Sarah.

The talk this month was from Ian Brantingham from SIGMA and was all about the aurora: its history, what it is and how it works. Ian stepped in at the last minute to replace Professor Keith Horne.

Once again, the equipment night was held in **July**. This was well attended despite a World Cup game being held on the same evening. As usual we had a variety of telescopes on display for members to enjoy. Thank you to everyone who brought equipment and everyone else who came along to browse.

Ken Kennedy spoke to us in **August** about Noctilucent Clouds, which form very high in our atmosphere and only during the summer months. This season has seen more than the usual number and Ken is very keen for observations of NCLs to be reported to him (ken.kennedy@tiscali.co.uk).

Once again, the Perseid meteor shower was hidden by the usual cloud thus spoiling our evening out.

We had two public events in **September**. The first took place at the Sports Centre in Inverness and was run by YourInverness. There were more exhibitors than general public but Maarten drew a crowd for his talk - even if most were members of HAS... Thanks go to Pat Williams, Pat Escott, Maarten, Antony, Arthur and Lorna Milnes, and Joan Thomson.

A couple of weeks later we had a very successful open day in the Eastgate Centre with over 80 programmes, information sheets and make-your-own space shuttles being handed out. The usual telescopes appeared with their owners, Arthur borrowed the TV from Highland TV in Greig Street again and young Arthur had his laptop with him. This was followed by a public great observing session in the evening, with the aurora making an appearance in a crystal clear sky. The Milky Way blazed overhead, deep sky objects were spotted through telescopes and we even had a couple of Iridium flares to keep us happy.

Thanks to Pat W., Pat E., Arthur Milnes, Arthur Fraser, Simon, Linda Moncur, Rita Fraser, Tom Hunt, John, Dave Hughes, Lewis Forbes, and Antony and Eric, who with Pat W. also made it to the observing session.

Our website was made 'Website of the Month' by the East Atrium Astronomical Society!

Dave Gavine drew in a large audience this month with his talk on James Nasmyth and his Telescopes. Nasmyth was an engineer who enjoyed building telescopes - the 20" being of a unique design.

Professor John Brown, Astronomer Royal for Scotland spoke to us in **October**. He has become very adept at using magic to illustrate his talks on hard to grasp principles of astronomy. He proved a great success, especially to the youngsters in the audience. John Brown has very kindly offered to help us in any way he can with our new observatory and has given his Coat of Arms to display.

In **November** Maarten gave us a talk entitled "Orbital Manoeuvres in the Dark" in which he explained in a very simple way, the maths behind flying a spacecraft. Then he demonstrated his mathematical and flying ability using a computer simulation to put his Delta flyer on an intercept course with the International Space Station.

Maarten also produced a brochure and had numerous copies printed so that they could be distributed with letters to businesses to try to raise funds for the new observatory. Thank you to Maarten for these.

If you want to know how to build an observatory then **December** was the month to find out. Together with a series of photos, Eric explained exactly what he did and how he did it. The result is a fully working observatory and well worth the hard work. Now all we have to do is to persuade him to build one for the Club...

Unfortunately, the children's talk, due to be given by Ray Owens had to be cancelled.

Instead, we were all entertained by Tim Schroder who told us about the various meetings he had attended over the last month. These included the Scottish Astronomer's Group Weekend, the Leeds Astromet, the Scottish Astronomer's Group AGM and he even managed to fit in a visit to Aberdeen College Planetarium which has sadly closed down. Thank you Tim for reporting back to us.

Later we had our Christmas quiz, won this time by Rhona and myself!

The **New Year** began with a talk from Arthur telling us how atoms and chemical elements were discovered and investigated and then linked this to the fact that all matter was created in the Big Bang.

Mars was the theme of the **February** meeting. I spoke about the various missions to Mars concentrating on findings to suggest past and possibly, but controversially, present water on the surface of the red planet. The images taken by the various orbiting spacecraft and those on the surface are stunning!

A show of hands was requested so that we might gain approval for spending money on pursuing planning permission even though we hadn't quite reached our funding target. The vote was unanimous and enabled us to take the first step on the road to our new observatory.

Tim and Bill Leslie gave a short presentation about the conference they and I attended on Dark Skies. This was all about how various groups could be encouraged to use the dark skies of Scotland to promote astronomy to the public. The best bit of the weekend was making a 'comet'!

Allan Thorne has been a member of HAS for a few years but is now moving to Falkirk. He presented us with a beautiful sundial and compass, which will be put in pride of place at our new observatory. Many thanks to Allan for his generous gift.

Simon Urry kindly spent time organising our very own HAS philatelic First Day Covers (designed by me) onto which was put a set of six astronomical postage stamps which had been commissioned to celebrate 50 years of the TV programme, "Sky at Night".

Brian Kelly spoke to us about meteor showers in **March**. First he described the difference between all of the different terms, then how it was discovered that they were linked (mostly) with passing comets and lastly introduced us to some of the better-known meteor showers.

We might get our five minutes of fame on television! A Gaelic programme maker filmed us having a star party as part of a pilot programme for STV. If STV like the short film, they will commission a series of six programmes about astronomy; its importance in the past and the links with the present. Thank you so much to everyone who came along on a cold, blustery and cloudy evening, some with telescopes and binoculars where we 'pretended' to see wonderful things in the sky. Actually, we were lucky enough to glimpse Saturn and Venus during a short, dry window after it had been raining all day! The three hours it took to film the star party and short interviews with Rob and myself will probably be condensed into three minutes...

Going Nova, the Science Festival, will be taking place on the third weekend of this month. It has been put together once again by Maarten and Howie Firth. Unfortunately this AGM report has to go out before it can be included but after the success of the previous one, I'm sure this one will be just as good. However, I can thank everyone who has volunteered to help in advance, especially Karen, Chairwoman of SIGMA who has organised the volunteers this year and Bill Leslie who will once again be in charge of the Faulkes Telescope.

Thank you to everyone who gave such interesting and enjoyable talks this year.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you the members, for your support, friendship and help. It is you who make the Society the success that it is.

Pauline Macrae
Chairwoman 2000 - 2007