

## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the British Astronomical Association held on 2023 October 25 on line and at the Institute of Physics**

The President, David Arditti, welcomed everyone to the AGM of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Session. He reminded members that minutes of the 132<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 2022 October 26 had been displayed for inspection on the website and invited members to comment. None was made and, following a vote from those present, the minutes were passed. He then invited the Treasurer, Mr Graham Winstanley, to present a summary of the accounts.

The Treasurer told the meeting that a summary of the accounts was printed in the October Journal and that the full version, reviewed independently, is available on request and on the website. Mr Winstanley reported that the results are in line with the budget. Expenditure amounted to £259,000 (2022 = £234,000) against an income of £133,000 (£136,000) resulting in a deficit for the year of £127,000 (£99,000). Investments are managed by the CCLA and offer low risk for charities' surplus funds. There was a decline in value of £14,000 (£165,000 increase) thanks to the global economic situation and higher interest rates. This year saw a decrease in funds of £141,000 (£70,000 increase). Total funds available are £1.548m (£1.689), a value about double that recommended by the Charity Commission for an organisation of our size. Mr Winstanley invited questions.

### **If we carry on like this, then in 12 years funds will be depleted: is there more we should be doing?**

The reserves of £1.5m are more than adequate, and we have been fortunate with legacies and investments. Subscriptions have recently been increased. Dr Arditti added that the Trustees monitor the financial position continuously and it is true that in five to ten years we may need to take action by cutting expenditure. The alternative is to increase the membership and Council is taking steps towards a long-term strategy for growth. Mr James said that the Association has been in this situation for a long time: we should look at the historical data and not over-worry. Despite the operating deficit being a recurring concern, reserves do grow bigger. Former Treasurer, Mr Lorrain, added that this year had indeed seen a decline in CCLA assets, but this is unusual and the trend is positive.

### **Did we make savings from moving out of Burlington House?**

There was an immediate saving of £30,000 per annum. This is offset by extra costs for storage and the environment for the archived records has had to be improved. At present there is no cost for use of the IOP, though this will change.

The President thanked Mr Winstanley and asked if the meeting endorsed the Treasurer's report. The meeting did so overwhelmingly.

Dr Arditti then began the annual review of the 2022/2023 Session, his second year as President. There have been 25 deaths of members, most notably that of Mr Bob Mizon, a great educator, populariser of astronomy, author, teacher and Co-ordinator of the Commission for Dark Skies for decades. He had increased public awareness of light pollution and had talked to a wide range of people. His persuasive capabilities make him very hard to replace. Mr Peter Edwards, planetary imager, contributor to many Sections and member of Horsham AS was another sad loss. The meeting held a minute's silence in their memory.

Mr Guy Hurst, Editor of the *The Astronomer* magazine since 1975, was recognised with an award of the BEM for his services to astronomy, presented by the Lord Lt. of Hampshire at Mr Hurst's home.

Meetings have been going well. The 2022 AGM included a talk from Grant Privett and the Presidential address was about the History of the Telescope (of which more later). At the Christmas meeting we had talks from Tim Parsons and Simon Kidd. Dr Arditti presented Prof Bill Leatherbarrow and Gary Poyner with the Walter Goodacre Medal and the Horace Dall Medal for developments in instruments went to Dominic Ford. The Sir Patrick Moore Prize went to Martin Crowe, Simon Dawes and Adrian Jones for their work on exoplanet transits and their collaboration with professionals. The first Cicely Botley Prize went to John Simpson for outstanding contributions to the Journal on aurorae and sunspots.

After the Christmas meeting, there was a social gathering at The Astronomer pub organised by Marie-Louise Archer. This year, there will be a drinks party at the IOP after the meeting on December 9: there is no charge but tickets are required in advance to track numbers.

At the January meeting Prof Andy Bunker gave a talk about the JWST and Javier Peralta on the Akatsuki Venus mission. In March there were talks by Prof Alan Harris on near-earth asteroids and John Rogers on Jupiter. The May meeting transferred to June – a feature that will continue in order to shorten the long summer gap – where the George Alcock Memorial Lecture was given by John Mason on George Alcock's work with Manning Prentice on meteors, and Jeremy Shears gave a talk on T CRB. In June, the Walter Goodacre Medal was presented to Nick James and the Steavenson Memorial Award went to Paul Abel. Steve Floodgate and Dave Grist won the Horace Dall Medal and Gift and Janice McClean was presented with the Lydia Brown Medal for outstanding voluntary work.

The Winchester Weekend in April was organised by Ann Davies who will step down as organiser in 2024. At the meeting Prof Patrick Irwin gave the Alfred Curtis Memorial lecture on Ice Giants and there was a Mercury and Venus Section meeting – the first in decades. The venue for the traditional one-day Spring meeting was the National Museum of Wales where the theme was Cosmology: thanks are due to Cardiff and South Wales Astronomical Societies for their support. Several meetings moved away from their regular slots and there was no out-of-London meeting, another permanent rearrangement as they have lately been poorly attended. The final meeting of the session was held in Leicester in September on the subject of practical amateur astronomy, where the main speaker, Prof Lee Fletcher, gave a talk on the JUICE mission to the icy planets: the other speakers were all amateurs. Thanks are due to Paul Abel for arranging Leicester University as the venue.

We have begun a cooperative relationship with the SPA that allows members to attend each other's meetings free of charge with reciprocal advertising. In addition to the main meetings, there have been many Section meetings, including Solar, Deep Sky, Mercury & Venus, Historical, Comet, VSS, Asteroids & Remote Planets and Radio Sections, all of which contribute to events for members. The first back-to-basics meeting since the Covid lockdowns was held at York in March. It was largely attended by non-astronomers, mostly members of the U3A, who heard talks themed on beginning steps in astronomy and many were appreciative.

In August the President attended the unveiling of two plaques which the IOP have fixed to the former home of William and Caroline Herschel in Slough.

John Berman has taken over the important task of website manager and Howard Lawrence has become the acting coordinator of CfDS, following the sad death of Bob Mizon. He and others organised a stand at the Association of Local Government Officers' conference in Bournemouth in September and lobbied several present for better lighting policies. Attendance at external events includes Astrofest, the International Astronomy Show, Federation of Astronomical Societies' convention and, most recently, New Scientist Live.

The BAA has extensive archives, most of which remain hidden. However, a project is in progress to digitise the contents and make them available to members. John Chuter, Archivist, will give an update at the Christmas meeting. The archives are now stored in a climate-controlled environment in Woolwich.

This is the first full year without a single administrative office. The office staff consists of one full time employee and two working part time, all based at home. They are supervised by four officers of the Association and have regular Zoom meetings.

Two legal cases are in progress: the former Curator of Instruments has some items in the instrument collection which remain unaccounted for and the legacy of the late Roy Panther is still before the courts. In both cases, the BAA has made attempts to settle out of court with no success. The Trustees monitor expenditure and think it in the best long-term interests of members to continue with both. Janice McClean, who is managing the rather complex Panther legacy, must step down from the Board of Trustees under the three year rule, but will continue to oversee the case and thanks to her for doing so.

Membership is down by about 1% over the year and stands at 2,533. It is not surprising to see a decline in a period of reduced disposable income but we would like to see some growth again. Several strategic plans are in development which, it is hoped, will boost the membership. Beginning in February, the Journal will expand by 8-16 pages to broaden the scope of its content and an Assistant Editor has been appointed to help Editor Philip Jennings in furtherance of this objective. The extra content will include more introductory material but the technical papers will be retained.

Of huge significance, Hazel Collett is retiring as Meetings Secretary after nearly two decades of working at the heart of the BAA and Dr Arditti invited her onto the platform. Mrs Collett explained that she is stepping down with some reluctance but is forced to do so for health reasons. Dr Arditti presented Mrs Collett with some gifts: a bunch of flowers, a vase engraved with a message, a sundial to be delivered to her home, a model of the sun and its magnetic field enclosed in a crystal and a book with printed messages from her friends and colleagues in the BAA. Mrs Collett thanked everyone and said that she had enjoyed her time as MS and intended to continue on Council and to oversee meetings held at the IOP. She thanked all those who made the meetings work, adding that she must have worked with ten Presidents. Dr Arditti said that her work had been invaluable with so many things to anticipate and plan.

Bill Tarver, Business Secretary, announced the results of the ballot for the 2023/2024 session. The ballot again had two components: paper returns and the online system created by CIVICA. Combined results were as follows:

President:	David Arditti	476
Vice President:	Alan Lorrain	<i>ex officio</i>
Treasurer:	Graham Winstanley	473
Business Secretary:	Bill Tarver	456
Papers Secretary:	Jeremy Shears	479
Meetings Secretary:	<i>Vacant</i>	

Five elected **Trustees:**

Ann Davies	402
Richard McKim	401
John Chuter	380
Geoff King	339
Tim Parsons	314

Five elected to **Council:**

Hazel Collett	368
Marie-Louise Archer	344
David Boyd	342
Bill Leatherbarrow	334
Alexandra Hart	304

Total valid votes	55 paper, 470 on-line = 525
Invalid/spoilt/blank	= 8

Bill Tarver thanked the scrutineers, Ms M. Davey and Mrs J. Rickard. He also thanked Mr Andy Wilson for managing the on-line ballot.

Following some routine meetings announcements Dr Arditti opened the 134<sup>th</sup> Session.