T.H E

NOTTINGHAM ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

B U L L E T I N

NO.18 January, 1948

COMMENT.

The Society commences the New Year with the loss of the services of Mr.A.J.Ashmore, our first Hon.Secretary and Treasurer. As most of you already know he is taking a course in the North of England, and as this course lasts over a year we shall not have the pleasure of his company for some considerable time.

At the meeting on the 1st January, Mr.Ashmore gave a short and interesting résumé of his connection with the Astronomical Society, which is largely a history of the Society itself because he has been so deeply concerned in it, and the following is the text of his address.

"It is with deep regret that I find myself obliged to relinquish my position of Honorary Secretary and Treasurer to the Nottingham Astronomical Society. Unfortunately I have to leave the Nottingham area in order to improve my private status and there is no alternative to severing my connection with the Society as regards the work, but I shall keep in touch as an ordinary member.

A change of officials has to be accepted as a routine part of a Society's affairs, and it may be wondered why I should be bothering to deliver a farewell message.

The answer is that I had the privilege of convening the inaugural meeting in 1946 and it is therefore a personal blow to have to cease working for the Society, the formation of which was the fruit of several years hopes and plans.

In 1938, a contributor in the monthly magazine of popular science, "Armchair Science", announced his intention of forming a national Amateurs Astronomers League with branches at the bigger provincial centres. I volunteered to organise a Nottingham branch and awaited results. Unfortunately, nothing further developed, and at the beginning of 1939 it appeared that the plans had come to naught.

Shortly afterwards, I decided to endeavour to form a separate astronomical society in Nottingham providing there was sufficient interest, and I wrote to the press announcing my intention, and calling for anyone interested in the project to contact me.

Well, the response was rather slow, but by August I had a score of prospective members and I considered it was worthwhile convening an inaugural meeting. The meeting was actually arranged to take place in the Mechanics Institution in mid-September of 1939, but the war broke out and the black-out with its consequent restriction of transport, followed by the general call-up of men, compelled me to postpone the meeting indefinitely.

Throughout my service with H.M.Forces, both at home and abroad, I thought of the possibility of forming the Society if I were spared. Fortunately I was able to return to civilian life more or less fit, and as soon as I arrived back in Nottingham in May, 1946, I took the necessary steps to ascertain whether the city still wanted an astronomical society.

I was very happy to find that it did, and within three weeks I was able to call the inaugural meeting postponed since 1939.

The story of the Society since its foundation does not need to be told here, but I can hardly conclude without paying tribute to the loyalty and encouragement I received from those members who helped me in 1939, and who again rallied to the cause in 1946, particularly to Mr.Granger, our President; to Mr.Lane Hall, to whom most of the success of the Society's present activities are due; to Mr.Lake Aske, without whose willing co-operation, our open-air meetings could not be held; and to Mr. Halley, my worthy successor and good friend.

To all these stalwart members, to Mr.Bennett whose kind advice and assistance was invaluable in the forming of the Society in the post-war period, and to everyone who has helped me in a dozen different ways, I say thank you and good luck.

The Society's affairs are in the very capable hands of Mr.Halley so there is no need for me to say I hope the Society will prosper, because I know it will."

We feel sure that every member of the N.A.S. will sincerely regret Mr.Ashmore's resignation but will join in wishing him the best of luck and success in his new walk of life, and hope that in the not too distant future will see him back in the Society taking an active part once more.

Thank you Mr.Ashmore.

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THE SKY FOR FEBRUARY 1948.

The Julian Date for February 0 is 243 2582. For other dates add the date.

The Sun.

Solar rotation No.1262 began on 11th January and rotation No.1263 begins on 7th February. Solar activity was still very high in December and the year closed with three large groups near the centre and two smaller groups passing off.

The Moon.

Moonlight interference occurs in the last third of the month; full moon on the 24th.

Occultations of all brighter stars have been rigorously computed for Nottingham. Particular attention is drawn to the occultations of Mars, which apart from its general interest gives an opportunity of actually seeing the moon moving, and of gamma Virginis a magnificent double, which is of very brief duration (about 15 min.). At Doncaster and just north of Lincoln, only one of the pair is occulted.

Feb.	18	nu	Tauri	4.4 mag	Dis. at 6h.32m.	G.M.A.T.
	18	72	Tauri	5.4 mag	Dis. at 7h.03m.	"
	18	284B	Tauri	6.0 mag	Dis. at 11h.48m.	"
	19	25°897		6.3 mag	Dis. at 11h.27m.	"
	19	125	Tauri	5.0 mag	Dis. at 12h.48m.	"
	23	MARS		-0.9 mag	Dis. at 13h.56m.	"
	23	MARS		-0.9 mag	Reap.at 14h.42m.	"
	26	gamma Vir.		2.9 mag	Dis. at 11h.08m.	"
	26	gamma Vir.		2.9 mag	Reap.at 11h.24m.	"

The Planets.

Venus dominates the western evening sky, though still small and gibbous. Mercury may be glimpsed in the first week of the month about 10° lower than Venus.

Mars and Saturn are up all night, with the first magnitude Regulus between them, completely distorting the usual figure of the sickle of Leo, and Mars the brightest of the three. Saturn's satellite Titan is in line with the east end of the rings on the 8th and 24th and north west and east at four day intervals.

Jupiter can be seen very low down in the south east at dawn.

Comets.

The great southern comet 1947n will have passed into history. It is impracticable to give particulars of unexpected comets, owing to the time taken in producing the Bulletin, but information will always be given at meetings, including open-air meetings when held.

Algol.

Minima before midnight occur on 7th February about 10h. G.M.A.T. and 10th February about 7h. Four to six estimates per hour. The useful observing season of Algol is drawing to an end.

Fixed Stars.

Orion is still the feature of the evening sky. From if learn the groups of Gemini, Auriga, the Hyades and Pleiades and the fine equilateral triangle made by Betelguese, Sirius and Procyon, and the mental map of the winter sky will soon fall into shape.

The Right Ascension on the meridian at 7h. G.M.A.T. is 4h. on the 6th, and 5h. on the 21st. See descriptive note for the December sky.

The Age of the Moon.

A misprint ocurred in the description of the simple formula sent by the President in the last Bulletin. In the note on month numbers in the last line, January should read minus 1, and not 1.

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COMET 1947n.

The Great Southern Comet of 1947 - as it has become popularly known - has been rather less than a nine days wonder. Easily the finest comet to appear in the skies since 1910, it was a naked eye object from 9th December until about the 15th, when it was still out of the field of vision of the northern temperate latitudes.

It made its approach to perihelion from almost behind the sun, and not until it had swept round its point of nearest approach did it draw away far enough to the east to become visible in the evening twilight in southern latitudes, approximately equal to Venus in brightness. It was then simultaneously seen by hundreds of people and has no individual discoverer. On the previous night it simply was not there, being still too close to the sun to escape full daylight.

It had then passed through perihelion, the point of nearest approach to the sun, a week before an was already fading, and although slowly moving northwards must have been well below naked eye reach when it was above our horizon abouth Christmas time.

A preliminary orbit from the early observations was quickly computed by L.E.Cunningham in the U.S.A. and an ephemeris produced from it of the comet's path in the sky up to the end of the year to avoid the risk of it becoming lost, and nothing further has yet been published (7.1.48). A cardboard model of this orbit was shown at the January meeting, and was sufficient to reveal that the comet was well placed for discovery, though a distant faint object, in the northern evening sky in the autumn. It may be hoped that when a more accurate orbit has been compiled, if the fuller observations justify it, a precise path can be determined for the autumn period,

as a search of routine photographs may reveal an image that would enormously extend the arc of observation.

It passed within ten million miles of the sun, a very close approach indeed, though a number of well attested closer approaches are known. It was then moving at a speed of some 280,000 miles per hour, and the radius joining it to the sun moved through half a right triangle in 24 hours. The close approach was probably the cause of its great brightness, for it is well known that a comet does not become brighter in accordance with optical laws as it approaches sun and earth, but in the part of its journey near the sun the solar radiation produces a local stimulation in the gaseous material in the comet, and for a comparitively short period the brightness may be many magnitudes more then expected. The fading on recession is equally sudden.

The disappointment in this country has been great. The lack of reports from middle latitudes as the comet cam north indicated that a pronounced fading might have set in, and it was looked for in vain by several experienced observers with the naked eye and binoculars after the perfect sunset on 28th December. There can be no doubt that many people "discovered" Venus, and with so many making their first critical investigation of the night sky, it need cause no surprise, especially when there was so little definite information to guide them. The ordinary man has no star atlas or almanac on the book shelf for such occasions to check the details; it would be gratifying if one or two had their interests aroused sufficiently to remedy the defect.

The Society did its best to broadcast the little information that there was, and the help of the local press is acknowledged in their objective and responsible reporting of it.

A.W.L.H.

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NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

New Members.

We extend a sincere welcome to the following new members who were elected on 1st January, 1948.

Miss J.Glover
Miss M.E.Mott
Mr.P.G.Reynolds
Mr.L.E.Richards
Mr.J.V.Whitaker
Mr.R.S.Woodhouse

Open Air Meeting.

If that all important factor WEATHER permits, the next open air meeting will take place as usual at Trent Bridge Schools, West Bridgford, on Thursday 22nd January at 7 p.m., as the meeting on the 15th had to be cancelled owing to the weather.

The Schools may be reached by taking a No.12 'bus from South Parade (Council House Square) Nottingham, and alighting at Lady Bay Road, which is the second 'bus stop past the Canal bridge. The fare is 2½d.

The following are the 'bus times:

From South Parade:	From Lady Bay Road: *
6.27 p.m.	8.06 p.m.
6.42	8.21
6.57	8.36
7.12 and every 15 mins.	8.51 and every 15 mins.

* The return stop is 100 yards from the School, away from Trent Bridge.

Ordinary Meeting.

The next ordinary meeting will be held in the Mechanics Institution, Trinity Square, Nottingham, on Thursday 5th February, 1948, at 7.30 p.m.

Bulletin Editor.

An editor for this bulletin is required - . As most members are aware, this duty was carried out by Mr.Ashmore, but on

his retirement his several duties were split up between various members.

However, the editorship of this monthly account of our activities was not filled, and temporarily it remains with the Secretary. Unfortunately the present secretary has many other calls on his time and would be grateful if some member would volunteer for this post, and anyone who feels they have the time to spare for this work, a matter of one or two evenings each month, would they please let the Secretary know.

Subscriptions.

Will members please note that subscriptions are in future payable to Mr.A.K.Bennett, who is now Hon.Treasurer.

Would members whose subscriptions are still outstanding please remit to him at any ordinary meeting, but if those members who are unable to put in a personal appearance at these meetings would care to remit by post to Mr.Bennet, West Villa, Gunthorpe, Notts. he would be most grateful.

Thank you.

Addresses.

Director of Observing Section.
Mr.A.W.Lane Hall,
19, Hartington Road,
Sherwood,
Nottingham. 'Phone 66587

Hon. Secretary.
Mr.C.A.Halley,
18, Clarendon Street,
Nottingham. 'Phone 2738.

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It is with very great regret that we have to announce that Mr.R.F.T.Granger died on Monday, 19th January. The loss of this able astronomer and charming man will be a very great blow to the Society.