



*Advancing  
Astronomy and  
Geophysics*

## ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Burlington House, Piccadilly  
London W1J 0BQ, UK

T: 020 7734 4582/ 3307

F: 020 7494 0166

Info@ras.org.uk

www.ras.org.uk

Registered Charity 226545

### MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2007 HELD IN THE RAS COUNCIL ROOM

**PRESENT:** The President welcomed Council to its newly refurbished premises. Professor M. Rowan-Robinson (President), Professor R.L. Davies, (Vice-President), Professor P.G. Murdin (Treasurer), Dr M.A. Hapgood, and Dr I.A. Crawford (secretaries), Dr A.J. Ball, Professor M.A. Barstow, Professor A.M. Cruise, Professor M.G. Edmunds, Dr L. Fletcher, Professor B.K. Gibson, Dr J. Greaves, Professor J.H. Hough, Dr J. Mitton, Dr V. Nakariakov, Professor E.I. Robson, and Dr J.A. Wild.

**APOLOGIES:** Professor M Bailey, Professor R. Harrison, Professor I.D. Howarth, Dr V. Nakariakov, Dr H.J. Walker (to whom Council sent good wishes for a speedy recovery) and Dr J. Wild

#### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2007 were approved and signed

#### 3. MATTERS ARISING

**3.1** Professor Robson reported that the UK co-ordinator for IYA 2009 had been appointed, that UN General Assembly approval of the International Year was expected (*postscript – the appropriate proclamation was passed on December 20*) and that the web site would be up-dated. He also noted that there was growing interest in Thomas Harriot.

**3.2** Presidential Portrait ( President) ó postponed

**3.3** The Treasurer reported that to date he had received 6 expressions of interest in the telescope bequeathed by the late Eric Northrop

**3.4** International Committee ó postponed

#### 4. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

**4.1** The President outlined the situation facing the astronomy community following the STFC budget settlement which had left it with a shortfall of at least £80m over three years, with a further £40m likely to be needed to create headroom for UK involvement in new projects. STFC has been grappling with a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) settlement for 2008-11 which, while slightly above the rate of inflation, amounted to a 7% cut when Full Economic Costs and the running costs of new facilities like the Diamond Light Source, were taken into account. Astronomy,

along with particle and nuclear physics, would be particularly affected. Final decisions would be influenced by STFC's Programmatic Review – but the STFC Delivery Plan included a cut of 25% of grants and put a question mark over the UK InfraRed Telescope, ground-based gravitational wave astronomy, involvement in the Dark Energy Survey, the Zeppelin3 underground search for dark matter, the Liverpool Telescope, the Merlin radio telescope and Astrogrid.

The President had resisted pressure from some quarters to avoid public condemnation, not least since private communications to ministers had been ignored. He felt vindicated, however, in the light of the concessions announced to negotiate continued access to Gemini North and to establish a review, headed by Professor Wakeham, to report on the health of physics in the light of the budget settlement. At the request of the Secretary of State in the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), John Denham, the President had been asked to publicly welcome the establishment of the review and to co-operate fully with it. This the President advised Council to do while urging the adoption of sufficiently wide terms of reference to encompass the role astronomy research plays in attracting funding and leading scientists to UK departments of physics. He also said that the RAS should maintain pressure on DIUS to recognise and make provision for the fact that STFC provided facilities for all disciplines. And finally, he felt that the way STFC had made their decisions without consultation with the community showed up their flawed advisory structure.

In discussion there was concern that the adverse outcome for astronomy was not so much an unintended outcome of a complicated decision tree but as evidence of government's bias toward applied science and knowledge transfer at the expense of blue skies research. It was also observed that even if there had been more consultation it was at least open to question that the community would have been able to agree on how to distribute STFC's much reduced budget allocation. That view, though, was contested by others who felt that the leadership of STFC had been tested and found wanting.

It was noted that more information would be made available at the Town Meeting called by STFC later that day. In conclusion, Council agreed to the President's suggestions (above) ; in addition that a meeting should be arranged with the management of STFC to learn lessons from this episode and that MPs should be encouraged to ask Parliamentary Questions (which the Policy Officer would monitor and report on at the February meeting of Council).

**4.2** The President announced that following extensive consultation with senior fellows he had asked Professor Fabian to succeed him as President for the period 2008-2010, subject, or course, to election by the membership. He explained that Professor Fabian met the following essential criteria:

- he enjoyed high standing in the scientific community (as a Royal Society Professor at Cambridge and as the UK's most cited astronomer)
- he had demonstrated leadership on policy issues (especially in campaigning for UK membership of ESO). This was particularly important given that IYA 2009 would fall during the next presidency
- he had a positive vision for the development of the RAS as the professional voice of UK astronomy( and for 10 years had been managing editor of Monthly Notices, though it was accepted that he would stand down from this onerous job if elected to the Presidency).

Council acclaimed this announcement but observed that it may want to consider replacing the traditional, informal, way of choosing presidents by a more open process, and at the same time revise the bye-laws to better define the role expected of that office in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**4.3** It was agreed that the Society should provide an input to the HEFCE consultation on bibliometric indicators of research quality. Professor Hough, through HedComm, agreed to formulate this and invited Council to send him email suggestions by January 10<sup>th</sup> (the deadline for return being 14 February).

**4.4** The President invited comments on the previously distributed paper which he and the Executive Secretary aimed to present at a meeting of the European Astronomical Society (EAS) in January 2008. The meeting planned to explore ways of improving co-ordination between its member organisations. A number of suggestions were made and incorporated into the text.

## **5. POLICY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

**5.1** Review of physics PhD/PDRA careers postponed

**5.2** The Policy Officer spoke to the previously distributed paper summarising the Government's response to the Science & Technology Committee's Report on Space Policy. It was noted that STFC's Delivery Plan was generally positive about Space with renewed commitment to the Aurora Programme and a willingness to consider UK involvement in human space exploration. It was agreed that there was little appetite for replacing BNSC by an Agency, especially given the creation of the Space Forum. Providing it was based on peer review Council confirmed its support of bilateral cooperation outside ESA, for example, with NASA and China. Not least because of the likely impact of the cuts to the STFC budget Council supported the proposal for a standing RCUK committee with a space remit. Finally, Council noted with some concern the view that the *unique* impact of space studies on STEM uptake in schools and colleges could not be conclusively demonstrated and therefore no further research into this area of student motivation should be undertaken. Instead, Council supported the encouragement being given by the Policy Officer to Liverpool John Moore's University proposal to STFC to fund a longitudinal study, in the expectation that this *could* produce conclusive results- one way or the other.

**5.3** Sainsbury Review - postponed

**5.4** The Policy Officer spoke to the previously distributed paper analysing UCAS statistics for applications to read astronomy degrees. This appeared to show a downward trend in recent years but, in discussion, it was accepted that more research was needed before that view could be substantiated. It may, for example, be that changes in degree nomenclature in physics and astronomy departments had distorted the figures. It was agreed that the Policy Officer would contact Heads of Department, coordinating where appropriate with the Institute of Physics, to establish the position at first hand.

**5.5** BNSC Working Group on Space Exploration Report - postponed

## **6. AWARDS, MEDALS & PRIZES 2008**

**6.1** Professor Davies announced the recommendations of the Awards Committee viz that:

- a. the Gold Medal should be awarded to Professor Joseph Silk who has been at the forefront of astrophysical research for 40 years and made important contributions to understanding the cosmic microwave background the very early universe as well as authoring several introductory popular books
- b. the Herschel Medal should be awarded to Professor Max Pettini for his seminal contributions to extragalactic astronomy
- c. the Jackson-Gwilt medal should be awarded to Dr Stephen Sackett for his outstanding work in astronomical instrumentation and telescope construction.
- d. the Fowler Award should be presented to Dr Will Percival for his outstanding contributions to observational cosmology
- e. the Service to Astronomy Award should be presented to Dr Günther Eichhorn, former Project Manager for NASA's Astrophysics Data System
- f. the Group Achievement Award should be awarded to the 2dF Galaxy redshift survey team for accumulating almost a quarter of a million galaxy redshifts
- g. Honorary Fellowships should be awarded to Professor Michel Mayor of the University of Geneva for his leading role in the discovery and characterisation of extrasolar planetary systems; to Professor Tim de Zeeuw, Director General of the European Southern Observatory, for his accurate black hole mass measurements and leadership role in the astronomical community and to Dr Michael Hoskin, the foremost historian of astronomy in the UK who has done more than anyone to promote the subject and give it a distinctive academic identity.

Note: The proposed Darwin Lecturer, it transpired, had given the same lecture in the early 1970s. Council was asked to forward suggestions to Professor Davies who would make a selection on its behalf.

Postscript: Professor Alan Watson of Leeds University subsequently was selected, not least to be able to hear about the latest results from the Auger Observatory.

**6.2** Professor Hapgood presented the recommendations of the Gø Awards Committee on behalf of the Committee Chair, Professor Bailey, who was receiving his award of an MBE that very day. The Committee recommended that:

- a. the 2008 G Gold Medal should be awarded to Professor Brian Kennett of Australian National University for his broad and seminal achievements in seismology. He combines geodynamic insight with an unusual combination of theoretical, numerical and observational skills.
- b. the 2008 Chapman Medal should be awarded to Professor André Balogh of Imperial College London for his leadership of several investigations of outstanding merit in the area of solar-terrestrial physics - in particular, his leadership of the magnetometer on the groundbreaking four-spacecraft Cluster mission.
- c. the 2008 Fowler Award should be awarded to Dr Christine Thomas of University of Liverpool for her work to obtain unprecedented resolution in seismic images of the thermo-chemical boundary layer (D") at the base of the Earth's mantle.
- d. the 2008 Harold Jeffreys Lecturer should be Professor Monica Grady from the Open University.
- e. Honorary Fellowship of the Society should be awarded Dr Spiro Antiochos, who is a leading solar physicist and currently Chair of the Solar Physics Division of the American Astronomical Society.
- f. the Award for Service to Geophysics should not be awarded this year as there were no nominations of sufficient merit
- g. the Group Achievement Award should not be awarded this year as there were no nominations

The committee also identified where unsuccessful nominations should be carried forward for consideration in future years and where updated citations should be sought.

**6.3** Both committees noted the disappointingly small number of nominations and agreed that they would need to operate more as search than review bodies in future.

## **7. BURLINGTON HOUSE**

**7.1** The Executive Secretary promised a full report for the February meeting of Council.

## **8. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE**

**8.1** Council approved the appointment of Newton as the Society's new Investment Manager and passed the following resolution:

Following the recommendation of the Finance Committee, Council agrees to appoint Newton Investment Management Limited as the Society's investment manager. Council appoints the following persons jointly and severally to complete the necessary legally binding arrangements on its behalf. Council accepts the agreed terms upon which Newton Investment Management Limited will act as investment manager for the portfolio.

Council further agrees that these same persons are appointed to give on-going instructions jointly and severally to Newton Investment Management Limited.

Secretary Dr. I.A. Crawford  
Executive Secretary Mr. D. Elliott  
Treasurer Professor P.G. Murdin

**8.2** Finance Committee report ó noted

**8.3** Library Committee report ónoted

**8.4** The Treasurer introduced a previously circulated paper on future staffing requirements. The planning assumption on which Council was specifically asked to comment concerned the library. Following the retirement of the Assistant Librarian in July 2008, it was proposed that the Librarian would run the Library alone, assisted, as required, by any spare capacity in office staffing and by additional funds from the Society's current income for temporary contract effort targeted at particular jobs or busy periods, holidays etc. If Council agreed to this there would be a review after 12 months when other staffing changes may have happened or be in train affecting the management of membership records, public policy and the supervision of the office IT systems. With the proviso that the library committee should be charged to review and report on the *modus operandi* of the library on a singleton basis before the changes are implemented, this was agreed.

**8.5** Dr Crawford explained that the Society awarded 2 annual prizes for the best theses in respectively astronomy & astrophysics, named in memory of Michael Penston, and solar-system sciences & geophysics. Until recently sponsorship was shared by 2 publishers, Blackwell and Wiley, and by PPARC. The Prizes were known accordingly as the **RAS Michael Penston Astronomy Prize** (sponsored by PPARC and Wiley) and the **RAS Blackwell Prize** (sponsored by Blackwell). STFC, though, had indicated recently that it no longer wished to sponsor the astronomy prize while

Blackwell and Wiley had merged to form Wiley-Blackwell. Wiley-Blackwell had subsequently confirmed its willingness to be the sole sponsor of both Prizes. There was, therefore, a need to tidy up the prize names and at the same time, there was an opportunity to honour another scientist by naming the solar-system sciences & geophysics after them. Officers, having given this consideration, recommended that it should be known in future as the **RAS Keith Runcorn Prize**. In respect of both prizes, where appropriate (e.g. on the web site, at the awards presentations and on the application form), the names would include 'sponsored by Wiley-Blackwell'. Council approved this change with effect from 2008.

## 9. OTHER

9.1 Council approved the following candidates for Election to Fellowship listed in OR/10/07; OR/11/07 and OR/12/07 and posted on the RAS web site.

Agnor	Craig B.
Alexander	Max
Andreae	Christopher
Antonik	Michelle
Austin	Matthew
Barker	Adrian
Baskill	Darren
Bassiri	Riccardo
Blackie	Douglas
Borderick	James David
Boulton	James Colin
Bradbury	Nigel
Carr	Ruth
Carter	Whit
Courty	Stephanie
Cumberbatch	Daniel
Day-Jones	Avril
De Freitas	Colin
Debattista	Victor
Doolin	Samuel
Fradgley	James
Hafez	Yaser A.
Harris	Kathryn Amy
Haughian	Karen
Hebden	Kerry
Hughes	John
Hurley	Daniel
Hutton	Susan
John	Daniel Steven
Jones	Adrian P.
Jones	Wayne
MacTaggart	David
Mansell	Candice
March	Marisa
McKinstry	Alastair
Noble	Jennifer
Parish	Glen
Paulatto	Michele
Peiris	Hiranya V.
Popescu	Cristina C.

Powell	Leila
Rassias	John Michael
Read	Kevin
Rein	Hanno
Russell	Alexander
Savani	Neel
Singh	Bishnujee
Tarrant	Neil
Thomas	Claire
Thompson	Emma
Tomkinson	Tim
Tsang	Sharon
Turnbull	Katie Louise
Wellbrock	Anne
Wellbrock	Anne
White	Richard
Ziemiecki	Ronald Henry

**9.2** The minutes of the A&G Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007 were approved and signed

**9.3** The appointment of, Dr Johan Robertson, Project Manager & Principal Geophysicist, WesternGeco London Technology Centre as a GJI editor was approved

## **10. AOB**

The President informed Council that the Society had been asked to nominate a correspondent for the Newton Institute of Mathematical Sciences and invited volunteers to contact him directly.

The meeting rose at 1300

.....  
M. Rowan-Robinson  
President

7<sup>th</sup> February 2008