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NEXT MEETING
THURSDAY, 15th March 2012
THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF HARINGEY
VOLUME 40 : ISSUE 5 : MARCH 2012
www.ashastro.co.uk

SOCIETY NEWS

MEETING VENUE :

Ashmole School, Southgate, London N14 5RJ.

The day for all meetings is usually the third Thursday of each month. The exceptions are August, when currently we do not hold a meeting, and December, when the Christmas Meet has always traditionally been held during the second week. However, in case of changes – and there have been a few over the last year or so – it is always advisable to double-check the dates below.

**NOTE - as below - the Meeting information is also on the NEW website:
www.ashastro.co.uk – updated from March 7th**

Doors open - 7.30pm : Main speaker - 8.00pm. Finish - 10.00pm

2012

March 15th : Jim Webb : “CSI - Space”

April 19th : *Dr Stuart Clark : “The Sky's Dark Labyrinth”*

May 17th

June 21st : *Jerry Stone :*

July 19th : *Nik Szymanek : “Photographing the Night Sky”*

August – Summer Break

September 20th

October 18th : *AGM and Small Talk*

November 15th

December 13th – Christmas Meet and Quiz VIII

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Currently we have TWO ASH websites running, in some form or another. The original is still under www.ashastro.org (*not* .org.uk), but this is now *not* being updated. The new version is under www.ashastro.co.uk. Note three of the links - to Meetings, Magazine and About - are now active. The Meetings link is now updated with most of 2012's calendar, while the Magazine link has some back issues there. These will be added to when time allows!

We may eventually decide to move back to the URL, .org.uk, (which is still available), or may stay with .co.uk. However whichever is decided, what you put into your web browser, will 'point' to whatever is correct. However the original direct ASH emails are not working, so will not get through. For the moment use the ones for Jim, Charles or myself, as listed on the back page. Eventually we hope to re-establish the ones with the <ashastro> in the name. *Ed*

COVER : Dominating the western skies after Sunset, the planets Jupiter (left) and Venus are progressively closing, and in fact will be at their closest – three degrees (six Moon widths) just before the night of the March meeting. Not quite as close, but still spectacular, the cover image was taken 5th March at 19.45. *Photo - Mat*

SOCIETY NEWS



We meet in what was the Music Room at Ashmole School. (And previous to that, it was the Curriculum Support Building - still noted as such in the map.)

This is the low building, (centre of the photo- right),

just past the Performing Arts Centre and opposite the main entrance to the technology block.



MEETING REVIEW : **March 15th : Jim Webb : "CSI - Space"**

Deciphering and analyzing data from space is a bit like forensic science. The clues are all there but someone has to put the lot together to make sense of it all. And the Crime? Well - that's another matter; all will be revealed!

And whether Jim turns up in a H2 Hummer - ala CSI-Miami – remains to be seen...?



MEETING REVIEW :
February 16th : Mat Irvine :
"Space – As It Should Have Been?"

The February meeting gave me the opportunity to put my, maybe slightly tongue-in-cheek, opinions about what may have happened, especially with the American Space Race, if President Kennedy had not made his "*We will put a Man on the Moon*" speech in 1961.

There had already been a great deal of work done by scientists and engineers, even artists, such as Wernher von Braun; (*centre below*) Willy Ley



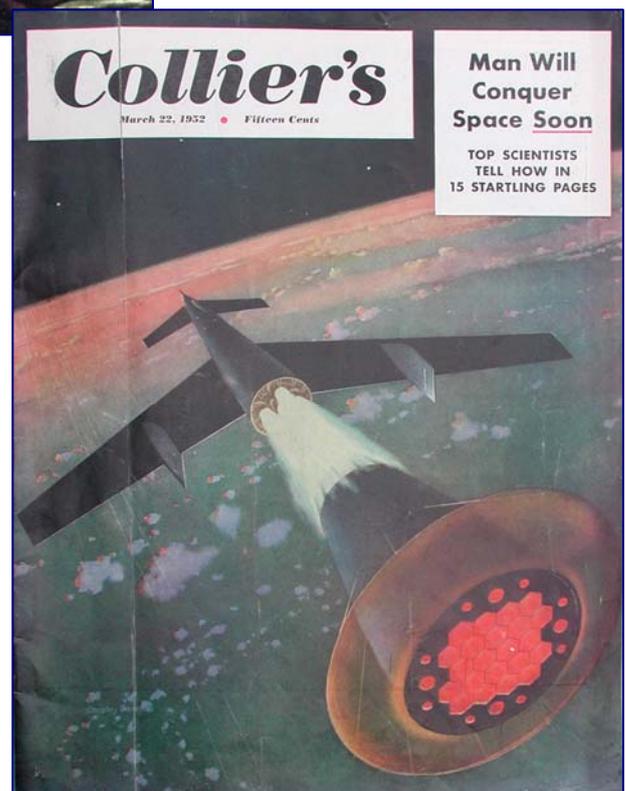
(*second from left*) and Chesley Bonestell, (*far right*), from the end of WWII and into the 1950s.



Many of these ideas were first published, to a wider audience at least, in the popular weekly magazine of the day – Collier's,

that ran articles in several issues over a year or so from the first in March 22, 1952 (*right*).

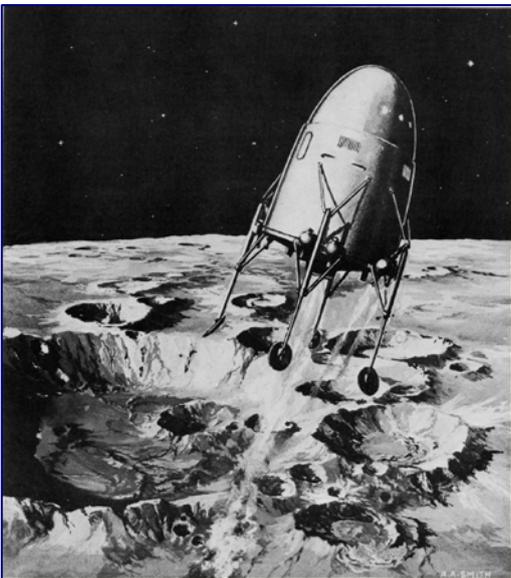
These were almost totally based on the idea that before you even contemplate travelling to the Moon and other planets, you first have to build an orbiting space base. Only when this is established do you think about building spaceships to travel further out. This is known as Earth Orbit Rendezvous – as the 'rendezvousing' of craft is done in Earth Orbit. Here giant multi-stage rockets lift off to meet giant space wheels circling the planet. Only at this stage would craft be build to travel to the Moon, and, perhaps more to the point, onto Mars.





At that time the idea of doing space travel any other way, was, well, probably never contemplated – except by some of the very earliest members of the British Interplanetary Society. These, who included our late Patron, Sir Arthur C. Clarke, devised a different method, using Lunar Orbit Rendezvous, where the docking and is done – as is somewhat obviously

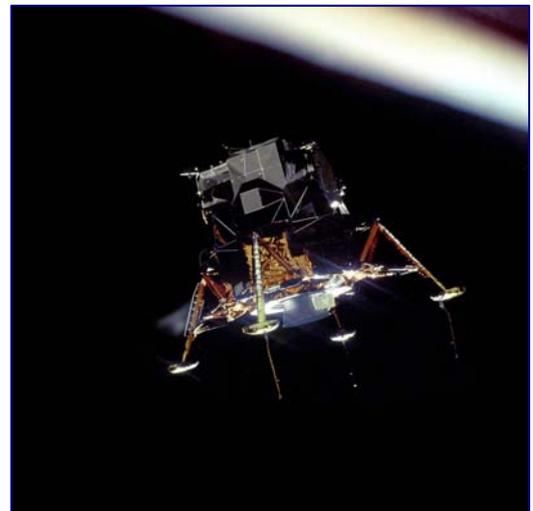
indicates - in Lunar Orbit, coming up with the BIS Lunar Lander, *left*. Probably no-one (including any then members of the BIS), seriously thought this idea would ever come to pass – until that speech. Then the American aerospace companies realised the only way they could fulfil their President's request, was by using this way-out idea invented by those Brits, 20 years before. The rest as they say is history. (*Apollo 11 LM below*)



Obviously since President Kennedy *did* make

the speech we can't know what would have happened if he hadn't?

Unless of course the theory of quantum mechanics is correct, which allows for multiverses, where somewhere maybe he didn't make that speech – and the visions of Wernher, Willy and Chesley did come to pass?



CHAIRMAN'S QUARTERS



There was a wonderful sighting the other day – a meteor that was seen all the way from Scotland to Cornwall! It was obviously a big one to have lasted as long as it did and must have come in at a fairly shallow angle to have been seen over that distance. How shallow we don't know because there were no reports from either higher up in Scotland to the North Sea or over the Atlantic Ocean. I was very fascinated by the authoritative views given by random professionals in the media. One claimed it was the size of a bus, (was it a single or a double-decker - it was not revealed?), another told us it was a 4.5 billion year old chunk of material that hadn't got round to forming into a planet and yet another said it came from somewhere between Mars and Jupiter. The known facts – it was big, with a shallow trajectory and spectacular – were ignored, presumably because we had all deduced this. Admittedly I did not hear all the coverage on the media, but it did cause a stir. If it had landed somewhere and been collected for analysis, more information about its composition and age would have been obtained. As it stands, it is an IFO (**I**dentifiable **F**lying **O**bject), it did not cause the end of Mankind and will remain a memorable experience for those lucky enough to have seen it. Much more than that cannot really be said, other than I wish I'd seen it too!

So what is inspirational? The recent conjunctions of Venus Moon and Jupiter were certainly up there. These are celestial spectacles that stand out (assuming clouds aren't covering the sky!) even in the light polluted skies of London (and any other big city, for that matter). My friends in the USA got to see the crescent Moon exactly between the two planets. It is those alignments, infrequent as they are, that make stargazing (or just sky-watching) such an inspiring and worthwhile activity. (*See SKY VIEWS – Ed.*) Fortunately the alignments are very predictable and add to the air of anticipation in preparation to seeing them. There is also the upcoming transit of Venus in June. However, the chance encounters and the unpredicted ones are the phenomena which are often the most satisfying. Meteors are the most obvious encounters. Admittedly, even here there are the regular annual meteor showers, but it's the unexpected events in between which have the "wow" factor. Comets are the next wonderful sights in terms of irregularity and unpredictability (despite the occasional 'regular visitor'). A supernova in our Galaxy would be the really big event in the sky! Admittedly, the last very visible one was quite a few centuries ago, but probability suggests we should be due one sometime soon. Ardent deep space watchers (the 'dark sky brigade') often spot supernovae in distant galaxies. These are the excellent 'hard core' who have an intimate knowledge of the sky and the passion to explore and catch the unexpected. This is, again, another example of that human spirit "*To boldly go where no Man has gone before*" that we all have but often forget because of 'daily life' getting in the way.

Seasons change, our surroundings evolve, but the wonder of celestial events seems to fill us with true wonder. "*The beauty is out there!*" – to paraphrase The X-Files – so keep watching the skies!

See you at the next Meeting.

Jim



CARY&WEBB : CLOUDY RIVER

As we try and feature what our Society members have been doing, (as long as it's at least vaguely relevant...), here's what your Chairman has been up to over the past couple of weeks.

With colleague Caroline Cary, Jim set up at exhibition at the Studio 106 Art Gallery in Fulham, that ran from 23rd February to 2nd March.



They had joined forces to produce *Cloudy River*, an innovative installation that combined traditional mediums of painting with the technological advances in the use of laser light. As a report in the local press stated, "*Cary&Webb created a world of light and colour, a lake and waterfalls of deep blue, to immerse yourself in, fashioned from lasers. Swirling smoke drifts in and out of a sculptural construction of painted Perspex. The all-encompassing sight and sound is a mind-expanding and emotionally moving experience. The experiments with the lasers is an attempt to use light as a three dimensional tool, using light as another way of exploring pictorial space.*"

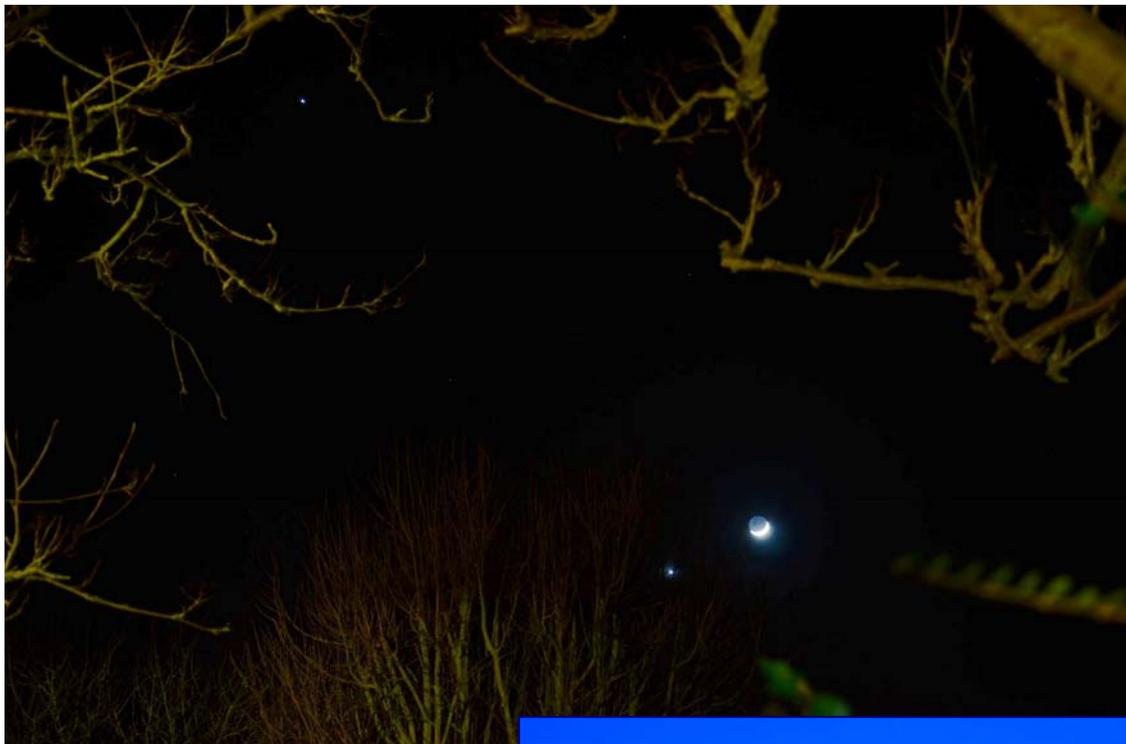
And as composer Simon Holt remarked, "*These are artists that keep you guessing. Their new directions are never a random decision, but always come from a deep knowledge of their individual and joint practices. There's a joy in the doing and yet a profound underlying seriousness to the play.*"

Jim and Caroline Cary have been collaborating for four years; *Cloudy River* represents a major extension of their technological and artistic partnership. We all probably know where Jim is based, but Caroline Cary lives and works in London and Southern Spain. She works in many different mediums, having begun her career in landscapes and figures, she has moved towards abstraction and to experimental work on Perspex.

SKY VIEWS - recent conjunctions...



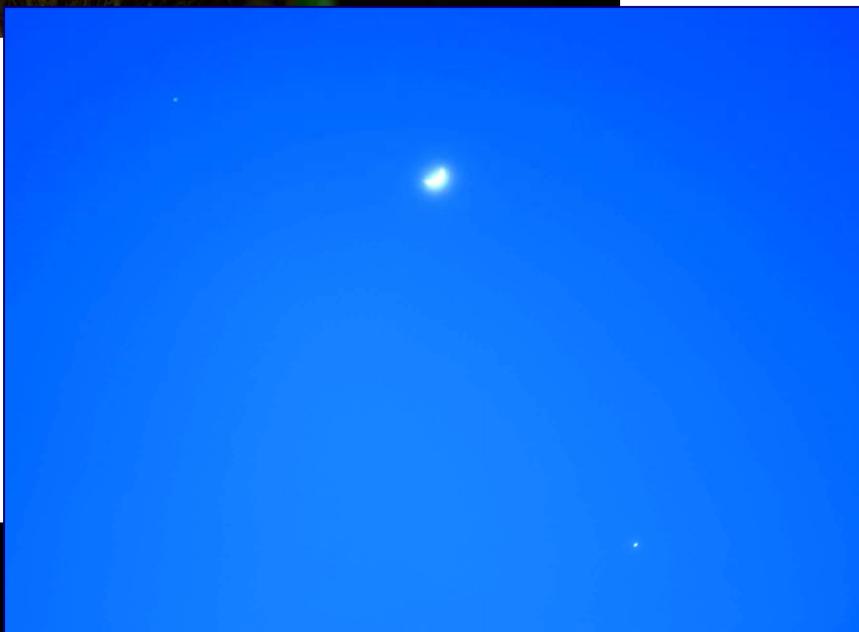
As mentioned in Chairman's Quarters, the night sky has recently been entertaining us with some spectacular conjunctions. Top is the three-day old Moon with Venus, 25th February. This also demonstrates that the sky does not have to be pitch black to see these sorts of images. Lower image shows the same scenario, but this time with Jupiter in the picture (top left), and note Earthshine on the Moon! Since then Jupiter and Venus have been closing - although this is all from our point of view on the Earth of course, which makes any of these 'conjunctions' purely apparent, not literal!



And
there's
more...

Above - the same date as the previous page 25th February, showing how foreground trees can be used to frame the image to - maybe? - make it more interesting.

Right one day later, 26th, the Moon having risen higher in the sky is positioned between the two planets



Left - The Moon is now out of the picture, as this was taken 7th February, but the planets are now noticeably closer. This will continue until the days from the 12th to 15th, where they will be at their closest approach - a mere three degrees apart. And if you want some idea of what 'a degree' represents, the Moon covers $\frac{1}{2}$ degree, so we are talking six Moon widths - not very much.

Mat

The Night Sky : March – April 2012

THE PLANETS

MERCURY : In the evening skies, low down in the west. Reaches inferior conjunction on 21st

VENUS : Still in the evening skies, extremely prominent in the west at -4.1 magnitude.

As per **Sky Views**, Jupiter is approaching Venus, really closing from 11th to the 15th, (the latter is of course the date of the next meeting). The crescent Moon is close on 26th March and the planet is at greatest elongation east, 27th. Venus is close to the Pleiades on 3rd April.

EARTH : BST begins 25th March.

MARS : In Leo at magnitude -1.2. Rising soon after Sunset, in the opposite part of the sky, and although not that bright, the reddish colour is apparent. Moon close on 4th April.

JUPITER : At magnitude -2, it is second most conspicuous planet for most of the night, only outshone by Venus. See **VENUS**. Moving west as the month progresses and having reached conjunction with Venus around 15th, it passes and becomes lower down in the sky.

SATURN : Now in the morning skies in Virgo, magnitude 0.7, near the bright star Spica. The rings are opening up, with the angle increasing by a degree or so. Moon close on 11th March and 7th April.

URANUS : Will be in conjunction with the Sun, 24th March. Moon close on 19th April.

NEPTUNE : Was in conjunction with the Sun 19th February. Moon close on 20th March

METEORS

Next major shower is the Lyrids April 22nd.

THE MOON



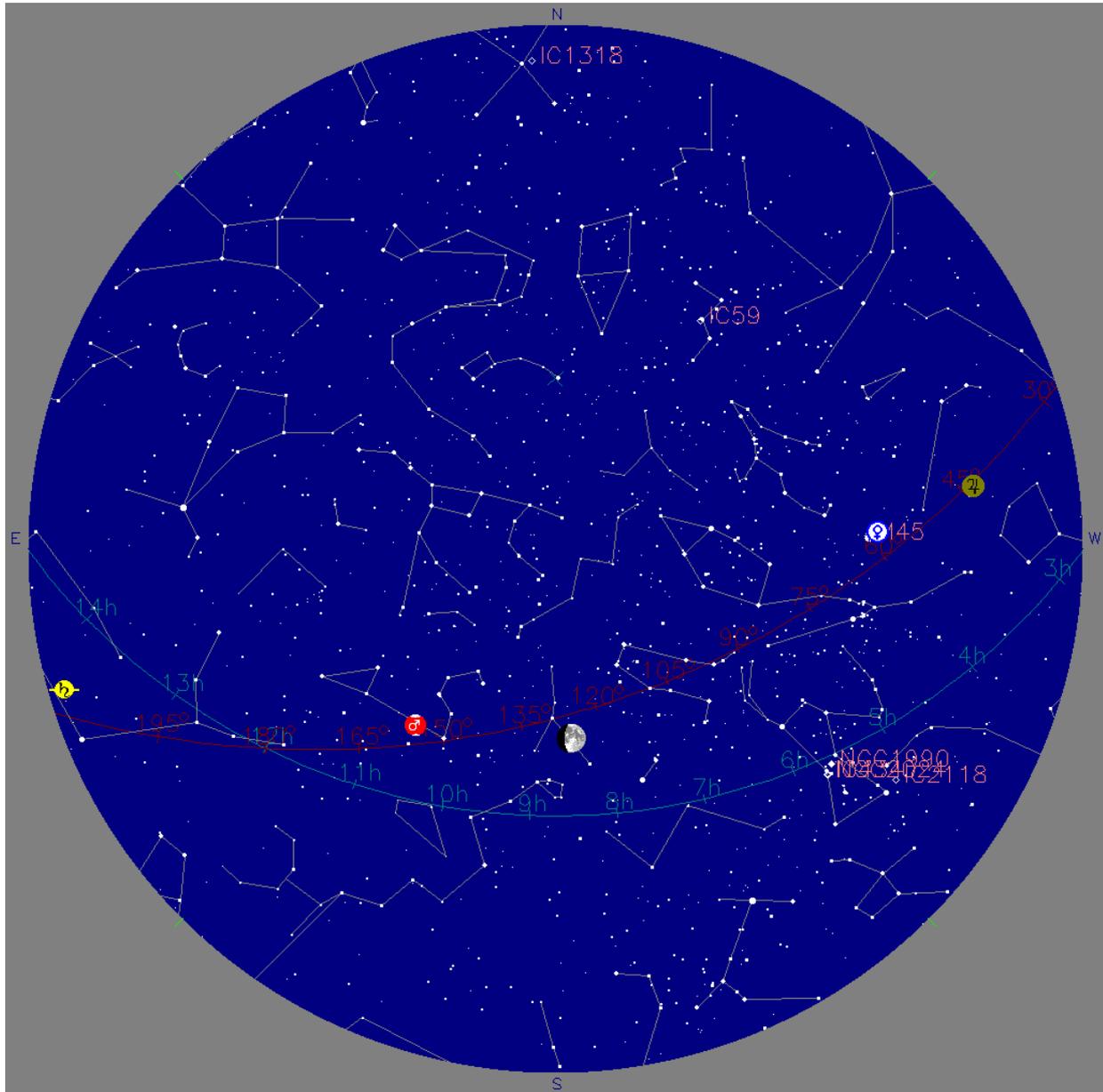
NEW 21st FIRST 1st March FULL 8th LAST 15th NEW 22nd
NEW 22nd FIRST 30th FULL 6th April LAST 13th NEW 21st

Future Lunar News – there is a ‘Mega Moon’ rise on May 5th. This is a time when the ‘Moon Illusion’ really takes hold, when the Moon looks far larger on the horizon than when high in the sky. This Moon rise coincides with perigee, when the Moon is closest to the Earth in its orbit anyway. All these details are small, but it all adds to the ‘illusion’. There is still some debate to exactly *why* this illusion happens, but it is most probably due to the thicker layer of atmosphere the image of the Moon comes through, and - as right (1st January 2010) - the Moon can be compared to ‘surrounding’ objects.



THE NIGHT SKY : March – April 2012

As of 1st April 2012, 20:00:00 GMT/UTC



KEY	
 MERCURY	 SATURN
 VENUS	 URANUS
 MARS	 NEPTUNE
 JUPITER	 PLUTO



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NEXT MEETING
THURSDAY 15th March 2012

THE ORIGINAL SOCIETY'S WEB SITE IS : www.ashastro.org

THE NEW ONE - UNDER BETA TEST : www.ashastro.co.uk

However use the emails as above for the present time