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NEXT MEETING
THURSDAY, 19th April 2012
THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF HARINGEY
VOLUME 40 : ISSUE 6 : APRIL 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 April**

Doors open - 7.30pm : Main speaker - 8.00pm. Finish - 10.00pm
New or updated information is in *italics*

2012

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

May 17th : Roger O'Brien

June 21st : Jerry Stone : The Day They Launched a Woodpecker – Part 2

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

August – Summer Break

September 20th : either Bo Maxwell or Peter Hingley - tbc

October 18th : AGM and Small Talk

November 15th - possibly Bo Maxwell, if he doesn't do the September meet

December 13th – Christmas Meet and Quiz VIII

WEB SITE - UPDATES

Currently we still 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, and dates for 2013, 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.

Note that the original direct ASH emails are now working

Ed

COVER:

As an introduction to our speaker this month, Stuart Clark, the main subject, well joint main subject, of his new book *The Sky's Dark Labyrinth*, Johannes Kepler. This is a portrait by an unknown artist, dated around 1610

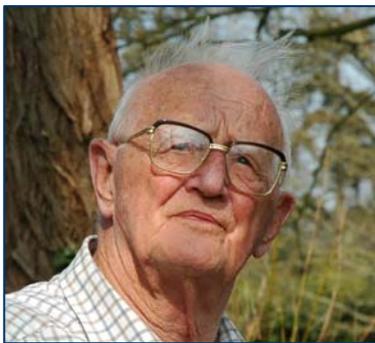
SOCIETY NEWS



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.



Happy birthday to our founder and President Fred Clarke, who was 91 years young on 6th April

MEETING REVIEW :

April 19th : Dr Stuart Clark : "The Sky's Dark Labyrinth"

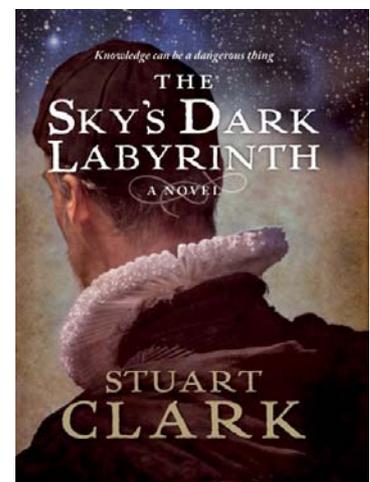


For Stuart's first visit to the Society this year he will be looking at the early astronomers Kepler and Galileo – but in a slightly different form than the usual. *The Sky's Dark Labyrinth* is set not as a non-fiction history or biography, but as a novel – and one that is Volume One of a trilogy.

"At the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Sun revolved around the Earth according to God's plan and as set down in the Bible.

Yet some men knew that the Heavens did not move as they should and began to believe exactly the opposite – a heresy punishable by being burned alive. The Sky's Dark Labyrinth is the first in a trilogy of novels that dramatically bring to life key moments in our understanding of the cosmos – when our view of the Universe changed forever."

Copies of the book will be at the meeting, so make sure to bring funds!



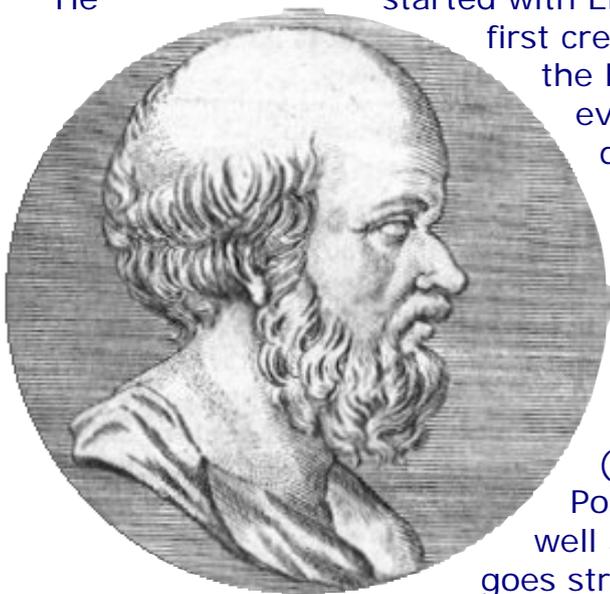


**MEETING
REVIEW :
March 15th :
Jim Webb :
"CSI - Space"**

The Chairman of the Society entertained us in his usual eclectic way for the March meet. Actually, as Jim had use the tile "CSI – Space", I had assumed that he was an avid follower of the American TV series.

However his first admission was that a) no he didn't watch it and b) knew very little about it... It was then down to your Editor, for the first few minutes before Jim began, to explain to anyone who didn't know (which presumably included Jim) what the three series were about. Though on reflection I think I spent the entire time explaining where each series was located, which came first and who starred – I don't think I mentioned anything about what they were actually about? But the term – 'CSI' – seems to have gone into the language now, and most I think these days are aware it is to do with forensic investigations at crime scenes. However exactly how Jim was going to incorporate it into 'CSI- Space' was initially unclear, until Jim explained that many of the techniques used in astronomical investigations, can be likened to the way Grissom and his colleagues went about find clues and interpreting the information.

He started with Eratosthenes, the Greek scholar who is first credited to measuring the circumference of the Earth. He did this by examining the evidence, The fact that when sunlight was directly overhead at Syene - measured by the cast it made as it fell straight down convenient well - it was at an angle in his home town of Alexandria. Knowing both the angle and the distance between the two locations, he was able to work out the circumference of the Earth, to a remarkable accuracy.

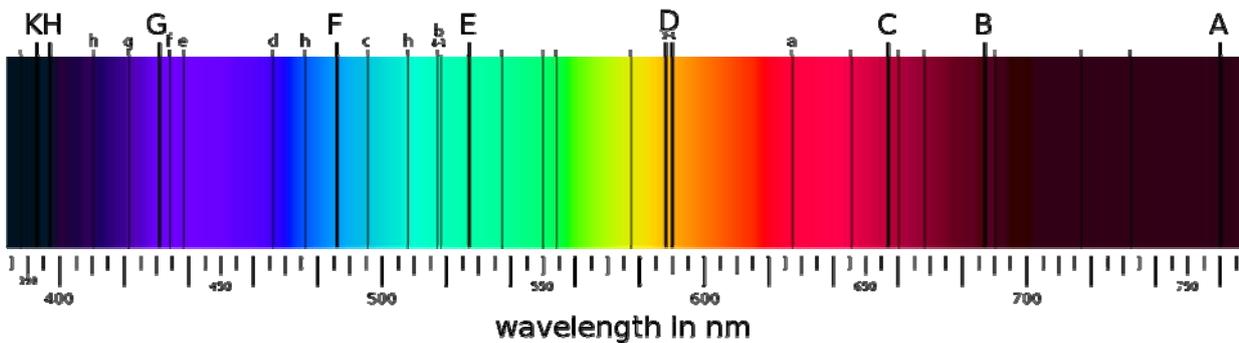
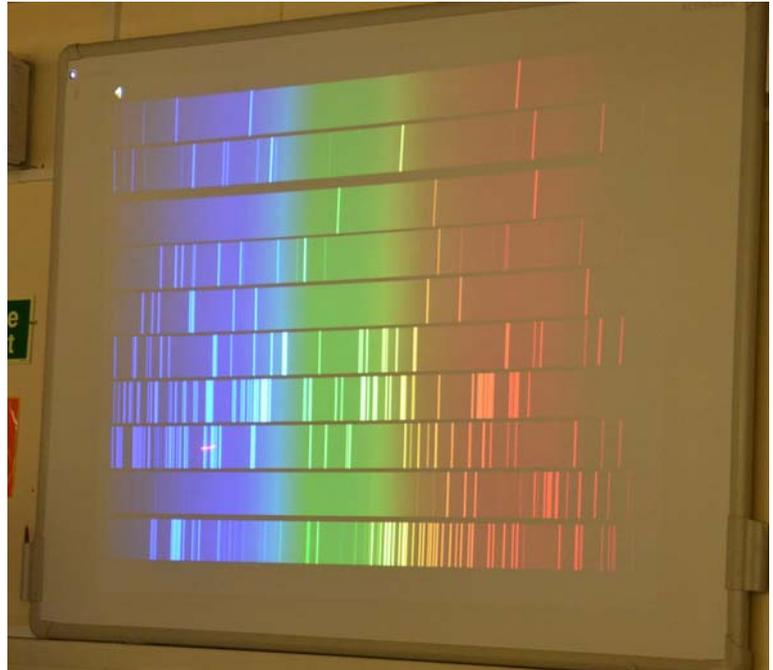


(Probably to an error of less than 2%.)

Possible many people had gazed down the well Syene, and exclaimed, "Hey the sunlight goes straight down", but that was it, they then went off to quaff another flagon of wine. CSI technicians don't tend to need to work out the Earth's circumference these days, but they use similar observations which then needs combining with some lateral thinking

to solve their present day problems.

In similar manner, it wasn't until prism had been invented, maybe by watching the similar effect of raindrops? - light could be broken into its constituent colours, and the by shining sunlight, came the revealing of absorption lines - Fraunhofer lines - which was realised, again my that lateral thinking - were the signatures of different elements.



At the conclusion of the talk, Jim, being Jim, also bought lasers into it, and here showed how laser light can reveal yet more mysterious effects. Without lasers, maybe we wouldn't know of these, which does bring in that long-term conundrum of what else is yet



to be discovered that we don't yet know about - that could be that tantalising CSI link that could solve yet more mysteries?

Mat

CHAIRMAN'S QUARTERS



Well, the Moon has been quite a sight recently, especially with the conjunction of Venus and Jupiter. I actually had the pleasure of seeing the crescent Moon and the two planets from a plane on the way back from Athens, although I didn't manage to get a photo. However, on the subject of the Moon, astrologers must have been having a whale of a time recently, what with all these alignments! This brings us to the question – does the Moon have an influence on us?

Texas State University recently posed the question “Did the Moon help doom the Titanic?” Now that's a cracker! Oceanographer Fergus J. Wood of San Diego, suggested that an unusually close approach by the Moon on 4th January, 1912, may have caused abnormally high tides. The Texas State team confirmed that a once-in-many-lifetimes event actually occurred on that date! The Moon and Sun had lined up in such a way their gravitational pulls enhanced each other, an effect well-known as a “spring tide”. The Moon's closest approach to Earth proved to be its closest in 1,400 years, and came within six minutes of a full Moon. On top of that, the Earth's closest approach to the Sun had happened a day earlier. The odds of all these variables lining up in just the way they did were, well, astronomical. This configuration maximized the Moon's tide-raising forces on Earth's oceans.

It appears that as icebergs originating in Greenland travel southward, many become stuck in shallow waters off Labrador and Newfoundland. Normally, icebergs stay in place and can't resume moving southward until they've melted enough to refloat, or a high enough tide frees some of them. The unusually high tide on that January could have dislodged significantly more of those icebergs than usual and moved them back into the southbound ocean currents. This abnormally large 'swarm' would have had just enough time to reach the shipping lanes for the 14th April encounter with the Titanic. It was also noted that the ice field in the area where the Titanic sank was so thick with icebergs that rescue ships were forced to slow down, and even shipping lanes were moved many miles to the south for the whole 1912 season! Based on these observations, the Texas team considers this to be a plausible scenario for why the Titanic was so unlucky.

So what else does the Moon do then? Well, apart from attracting the occasional astronaut, it does have a very real effect on the oceans in the form of the tides. It has been postulated that these tidal effects also manifest in our own bodily fluids, affecting our behaviour. Whether we choose to go along with this notion, there is empirical evidence to suggest this. The usage of the term 'loonie', (from 'lunatic'; itself of course from the Latin, 'Luna'), was coined from the fact that people tended to behave more strangely around the time of the Full Moon than at any other times. It appears that the New York City emergency services go on particularly high alert for several days either side of the Full Moon to deal with the increased amounts of 'weirdness' (accidents, shootings and general mayhem) among the residents. This appears to be the case in other US cities, as well. Interestingly, 'weirdness' appears to hit a minimum around the New Moon. Whatever the reason, it comes as no surprise that both the Full Moon and the Crescent phase fill us with particular wonder and are always times of exceptional visual splendour.

Oooohh – Full Moon coming up soon!

Jim

SKY VIEWS - recent conjunctions...



The close conjunctions of Moon, Venus and Jupiter on 25th (top) and 26th March. The faint Jupiter is to the left of the Moon in the top picture, and at about 5.o'clock and now much further below the Moon in the bottom image.



The Night Sky : April – May 2012

THE PLANETS

MERCURY : In the evening skies, but low down in the west and difficult to spot. Reaches greatest elongation west on 18th April. Moon close on 19th. Mercury will be 2 degrees south of Uranus on 22nd.

VENUS : Still in the evening skies, extremely prominent in the west at -4.1 magnitude. Venus passed through the Pleiades star cluster during the first week of April, though cloudy skies prevented any decent views. Moon close on 25th April

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 1st May.

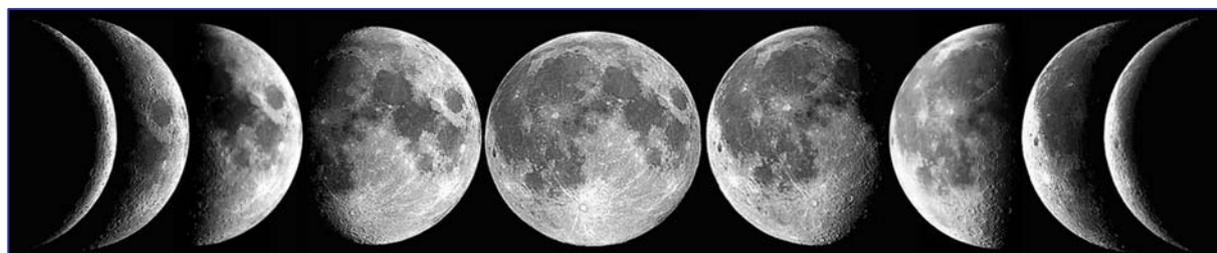
JUPITER : At magnitude -2, it is still second most conspicuous planet for most of the night, but fading at about sixth the brightness of Venus. Dropping into the west as the month progresses becoming lower down in the sky and soon will be lost from view as the planet will be in conjunction with the Sun on 13th May.

SATURN : At opposition 15th April. Now in the evening 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 4th May.

URANUS : Was in conjunction with the Sun, 24th March. Moon close on 19th April and 16th May. To the north of Mercury on 22nd April.

NEPTUNE : Was in conjunction with the Sun 19th February. Moon close on 16th April

THE MOON



NEW 22nd
NEW 21st

FIRST 30th
FIRST 29th

FULL 6th April
FULL 6th May

LAST 13th
LAST 12th

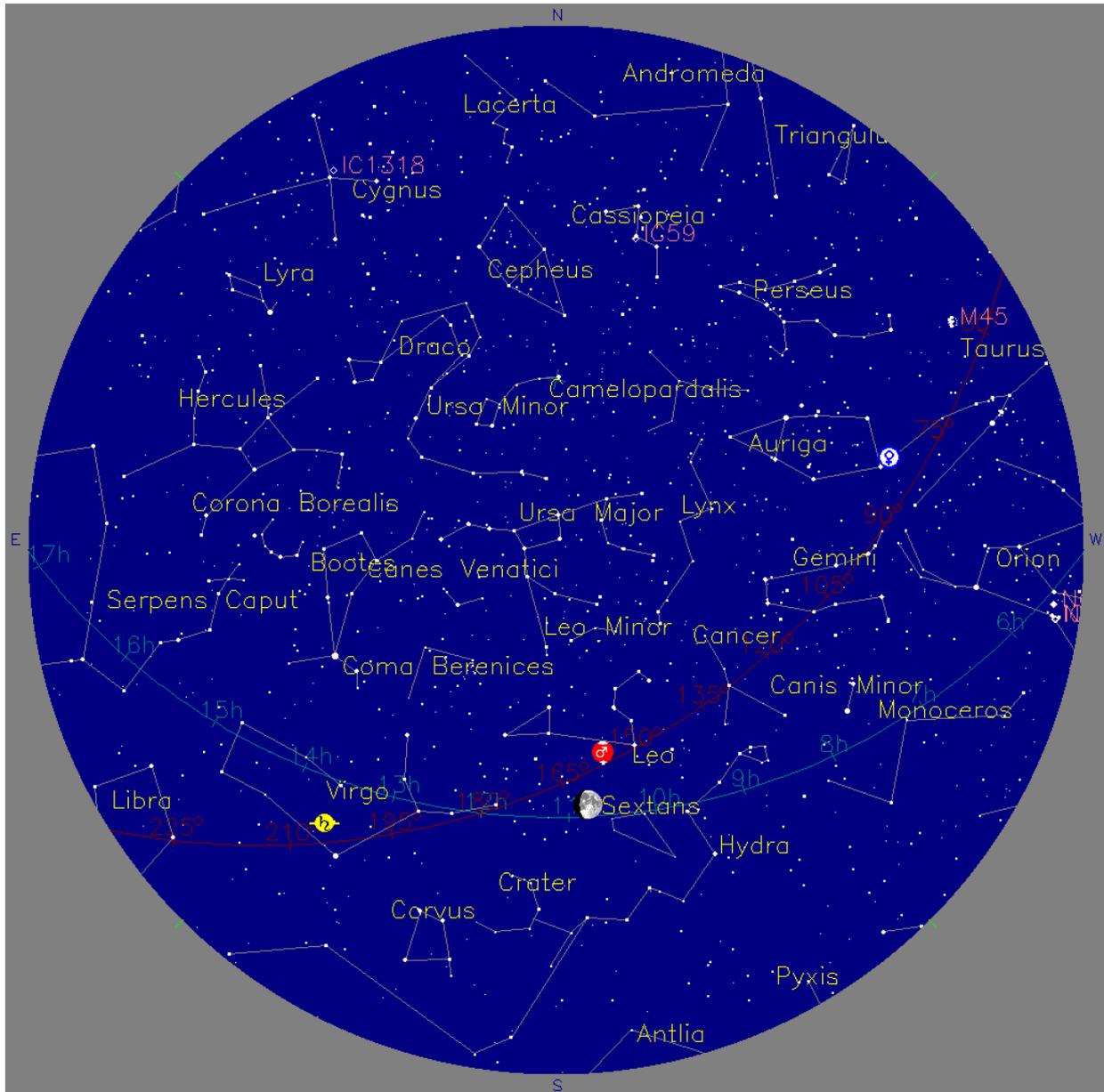
NEW 21st
NEW 20th

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 actually 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



Astronomical Society of Haringey

Patron: **Sir Arthur C. Clarke, C.B.E., B.Sc., F.R.A.S., F.B.I.S.**

President : **Frederick W. Clarke, F.Ph.S.(Eng), F.B.I.S.**

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ASH COMMITTEE MEMBERS : 2011 – 2012

CHAIRMAN : Jim Webb

020.8441.7421 chairman@ashastro.co.uk [www.glservices.org]

SECRETARY and MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY : Charles Towler

01707 322686 secretary@ashastro.co.uk

TREASURER : Gordon Harding

020.8444.2229

EDITOR, P.R.O. and VICE CHAIRMAN : Mat Irvine

01908.510191 editor@ashastro.co.uk [www.smallspace.demon.co.uk]

GENERAL MEMBER : Mitchell Sandler 020.8958.4185

GENERAL MEMBER : Liz Partridge

JUNIOR MEMBER : Nicholas Lucas

WEBMASTER and GENERAL MEMBER AT LARGE : Gary Marriott

Contact addresses :

Chairman and general enquiries : 136, Lancaster Road, East Barnet, Herts EN4 8AL

Secretary and Membership : 6 Parkway Close, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 6HJ

Treasurer : 57 Tetherdown, London N10 1NH

Editor and PRO : The Forge Cottage, 20 Gold Street, Hanslope, Bucks MK19 7LU

NEXT MEETING **THURSDAY 19th April 2012**

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

Note there are now 'ASH' email addresses – as above

General queries to <info@ashastro.co.uk>

THE ORIGINAL WEB SITE : www.ashastro.org