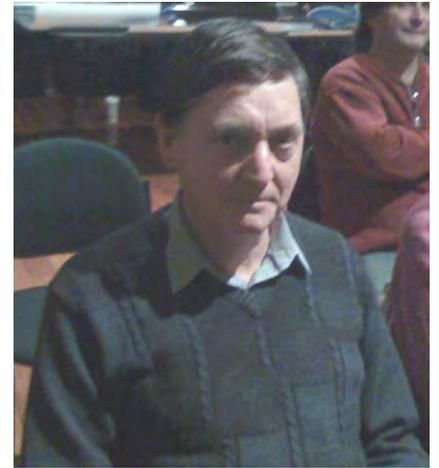


JULY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

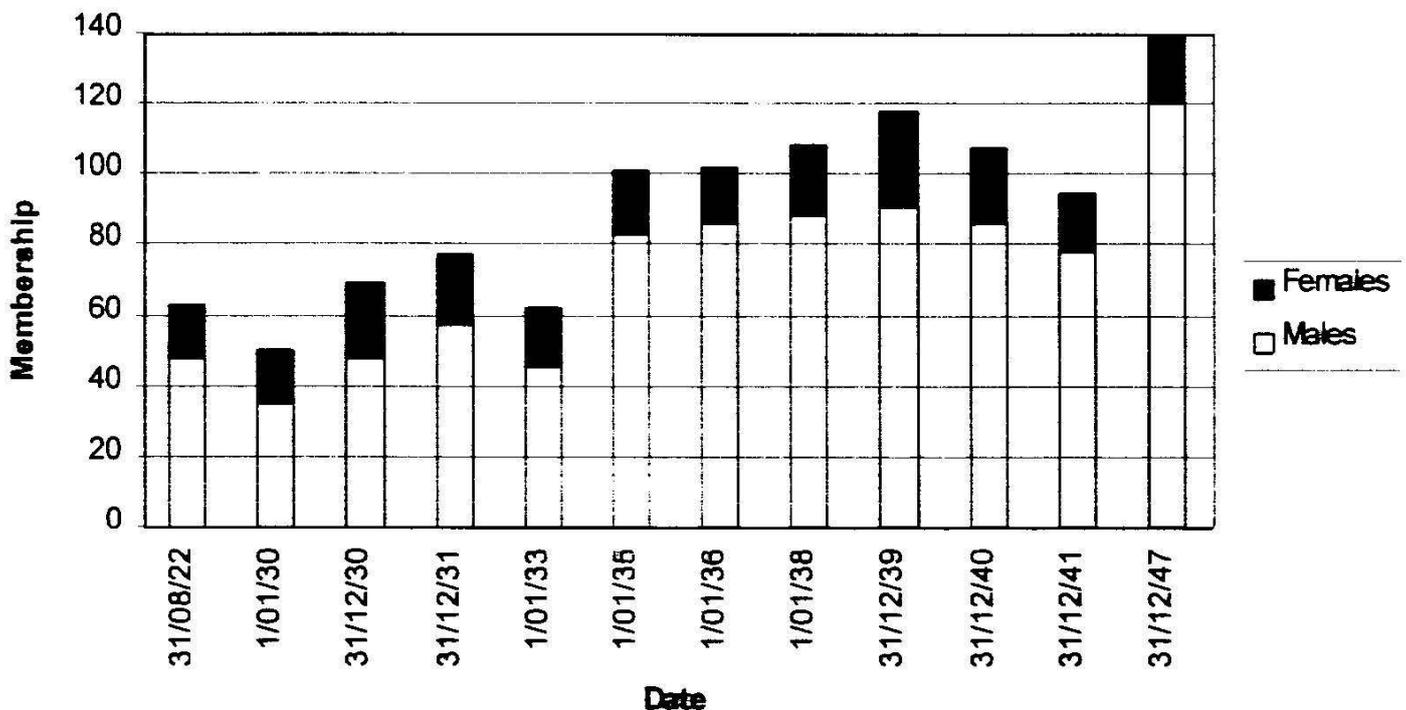
Syllabus Speaker: Rod Brown, Historic Section and Public Demonstration Director for the ASV

Rod talked about: The 90th anniversary of the Astronomical Society of Victoria, and its history



“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways...” Memory and ageing are a curious match. At mid-life you look back on what you did (or wrote) years ago in your youth and you think, ‘was I foolish (childish) then!’. But towards old age you start to admire and long-for the simple, carefree days of youth, with its limitless imagination and creative ideals: ‘I wish it had always been like that’. Thus our perception of the past, the historic significance of events, to us changes over the years and is often symbolised in fortuitous connections. Like Cook’s discovery of Australia, which was actually an afterthought to his the transit of Venus project: to, if time and resources permit, explore the Southern Seas in search of the mythical Great Southern Continent! Or the two lines from an obscure poem “Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong under the shade of a coolibah tree...” which did more to shape the Australian image than all the volumes of Geoffrey Blainey’s history books did, and the diggers’ symbolic Eureka Stockade flag probably more than the monumental Act of Federation. It is us who create history, today, in our selection of the events of the past that we feel would fit our vision of the future.

ASV Membership 1922-1947



The ASV turned 90 this year and, looking back, its popularity seems to have really taken off with the 1960s interest in space exploration. Under the guidance of visionary leaders membership reached the magical number one thousand in the heady days of 2004, a tenfold increase over numbers at the 25th anniversary. Active promotion and “Astronomy for the People” would have played a major role there. I remember my wife and I were actually introduced to the ASV in 1983 by Jim Pollock (we think it was him), handing out promotional leaflets at one of the Myer Music-bowl concerts we were visiting. The first meeting we attended was held in a basement room of the State



Library in Latrobe Street. A slight decline in membership since then can perhaps be attributed to the fact that astronomy and its equipment is becoming more technical and specialised, involving some steep learning curves for average, non-technical persons. But, compared to statistics Rod Brown showed from the ASV's early days, this is still pretty good.

I love the new ASV website format. It features the full CRUX Newsletters for the last ten years. You can browse through any of the issues and read up on what was happening then, in full colour too! Actually, not quite 10 years. While trying to put together this report I felt memories coming back of the previous ASV anniversary meeting (the 80th) in 2002. But the Internet archives stop at 2003! I did eventually find my write-up on that occasion, and Rod Brown had spoken then about the formation of the ASV and on its evolution (together with several others), to celebrate that anniversary. An even more comprehensive report was given by Rod at the 75th Anniversary in 1997. Well worth a read if you can find a copy of Crux, issue 3, of that year.

Rod's PowerPoint presentation listed the first ASV meeting in 1922 with 80 people attending, the early pioneers and their facilities. To me it looks as though the activities of the society then were pretty much focussed on visual astronomy projects, with scant attempts to involve the wider public in its research. A stark contrast to the image Rod showed of the scope of current ASV activities, with outreaches into all aspects of astronomy. This, together with its dynamic leadership is bound to continue the ASV on its path of growth and prosperity! The vote of thanks was given by the President, Ken Le Marquand, to general acclaim

Perry Vlahos added to the historic atmosphere of the night with recollections of Leon Mow, the benefactor of the parcel of land near Heathcote, and a slide-show of early establishing days at the Leon Mow Dark Sky site. This was complemented by Greg Walton's hop skip and jump presentation through some of the ASV's later activities, right up to the Transit of Venus observation at the Melbourne Observatory in June this year.

For supper there were lots of nibblies, coffee and an anniversary cake. What a cake! Symbolising the transit of Venus across the face of the Sun, it served as the centre for an assembly-of-past-presidents-photo and then for the cutting ceremony. It needed a double-handed hold on the electric knife to portion out the solid chocolate cherry-ripe cake. I am not sure who did get hotter in the process, the electric knife or Perry doing the cutting. In the end everyone finished up with a piece of the delicious anniversary cake, and Perry with a well-earned rest. It was a memorable 90th Anniversary.

AK



Vic Terrell with one of his 12-inch reflectors, circa 1950, ASV member, past Councillor

