

# The Newcastle Astronomical Society

By David Hough

THE NEWCASTLE Astronomical Society Inc. (NAS) is an eclectic mix of people drawn together for the love of an interest, and for some, an obsession in life (I put my hand up here as Vice President of the Society).

The NAS had its roots developed in the first part of last century. Dr Colin Keay discovered that the first incarnation of the Newcastle Astronomical Society was run by prominent Novocastrians that included Mark Howarth (deceased before 1965), who operated an Observatory at Mayfield, together with Dr Alan Way (a dentist) and Dr Stan Baker (a physics teacher at the Newcastle campus of the University of NSW).

Unfortunately this early form of the Society was wound up before Keay was able to join its ranks when he settled in Newcastle after accepting a posting at the University of Newcastle in 1965. Shortly before Keay retired in 1993, he founded the new incarnation of the NAS, with a constitutional emphasis on public education, which granted the NAS use of the University's lecture theatres for meetings and allowing the public access. The first meeting had an attendance of 248 people, and over the years dwindled to a steady 50+ per month attending meetings. The club's logo was developed by a former member, Titus Wicklendt, just before the first meeting.

The constitution of the NAS was primarily set up to ensure the Society actively sought to educate and inform the people of Newcastle and the Hunter. Some prominent astronomical events have given the Society some news time amongst the general population, including the Transit of Venus (held on the shores of the Hunter River in the Port of Newcastle where it was broadcast live with ABC Newcastle) and the Transit of Mercury in 2006, as well as the closest approach of Mars.

We attend school functions when invited,



and continue to hold public viewing nights to entice a new generation of budding astronomers to participate in this fantastic pastime and make a difference in our community.

The NAS has been indeed very lucky to have such a prominent astronomer such as Colin Keay. Ultimate recognition of his research in astronomy came in 1997 when a minor planet was named in his honour - 5007 Keay. For over 40 years he has been an active member of the International Astronomical Union.

Through his close astronomical community contacts, Keay was able to entice many world class speakers to address the Society over the years. The NAS has enjoyed presentations by a number of eminent astronomers, including Penny Sackett (Director of Mount Stromlo Observatory), Richard Manchester (leading pulsar expert), Russell Cannon (Director of the Anglo-Australian Observatory), David Malin, and a swath of Australia's leading astronomers and astro imagers.

So far the club has had four presidents - Colin Keay, Jeanette Rothapfel, George Barnes and currently Ghul Hussain. As a founding member, and first Club President, and in recognition of his unconditional support and enthusiasm for the society, Keay is the NAS's only life member.

There are a few active core groups within



**Above:** Community viewing of the Transit of Venus in 2004.  
**Above left:** Supernova hunter Reverend Robert Evans and Dr Colin Keay at a NAS club meeting in May 2005.

the club involved in astrophotography, telescope building, optics, and education. We are lucky to have gifted members such as Eddie Roca, George Livanous, and Dennis Zambelis who really drive the telescope and mirror making side of the club.

On the astrophotography front, Scott Adler is our shining light (his images have appeared in *Australian Sky & Telescope*), with occasional guest appearances from me, but above all we actively encourage all to give astrophotography a go.

The Society's other members, who tirelessly apply themselves to education and community involvement, are an unsung mix of heroes who number too many to list here.

We welcome new members, and if you would like to find out more then please contact the NAS. ♦

## Newcastle Astronomical Society

**Meetings:** Last Friday of every month except December

**Venue:** University of Newcastle

**Contact:** info@nas.org.au or phone Lydia Macokatic on (02) 4942 3393.

**Web:** www.nas.org.au

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