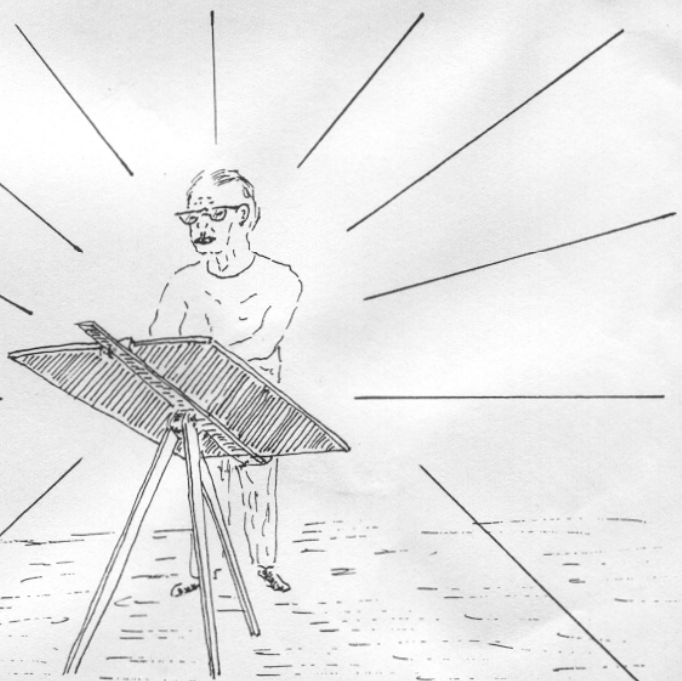


ORWELL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY IPSWICH

Charity No 271313

APRIL 2000



THIS MONTH IT IS MY 40TH COVER AND ALSO MY 87TH BIRTHDAY ~ BOASTING? YOU BET!

*L. Lamb
April 2000*

Society News

1 Next Committee Meeting

The next committee meeting will be held on Saturday 8th April from 19:30 in the clubroom. This is an open meeting and any one who is interested is invited to attend.

2 Events for 2000

Event	Details	Date
Star Tracking at Ipswich Museum	A space exploration and astronomy exhibition with lunar samples, a NASA space suit, meteorites and activities for children	12 th February to 1 st April Free admission Museum opening hours (Tuesdays to Saturdays)
Lecture Meeting	21 st century astronomy – short talks by members 20:00, Friends' Meeting House	Friday 31 st March
Visit to Norwich AS observatory	To be arranged.	March /April
Visit to Cambridge AS and Braintree AS	These were proposed at the AGM	Nothing arranged yet
BAA Winchester Weekend		14 th to 16 th April
Lecture Meeting	Twinkle twinkle little (neutron) Star, Paul Roche National Space Science Centre This talk is entertaining as well as informative. 20:00, Friends' Meeting House	Friday 9 th May
BAA Exhibition Meeting	London Guildhall University	24 th June
Summer Barbecue	To be arranged	
Summer Excursion	No date fixed yet. No venue fixed yet	
Open Weekend		7 th & 8 th October
Equinox Star Party	Thetford Organiser; Loughton A.S	25 th October
Lecture Meeting	Mars and the Amateur Astronomer, Richard McKim, Director of the BAA Mars Section.	Friday 24 th November
Christmas Meal	Provisionally set for the 13 th	

Night Sky

All times GMT

Sun

The sun will be rising approximately between 05:25 to 04:40

The sun will be setting approximately between 18:40 to 19:15

Moon

New Moon	1 st Quarter	Full Moon	3 rd Quarter
4 th	11 th	18 th	24 th

- Mercury** Mercury will be to badly placed for observing this month, in the predawn sky.
- Venus** Venus remains in the morning sky, but is too close to the sun to be seen this month.
- Mars** Mars remains low in the western sky after sunset. It will be setting at about 21:00 at the end of the month. Magnitude 1.5
- Jupiter** Jupiter will also be setting by 20:00 at the end of the month. Magnitude -2.0.
- Saturn** Saturn remains visible in the early evening sky this month. It will be setting around 20:15 at the end of the month. Magnitude 0.3
- Uranus** Uranus will be rising at about 03:20 in mid month.
- Neptune** Neptune will be rising at about 02:40 in mid month.

Meteor Showers

Shower	Limits	Maximum	ZHR
Lyrids	April 19 th to 25 th	April 22 nd 20:00	10
η Aquarids	April 24 th to May 20 th	May 4 th	40
α Scorpids	April 20 th to May 19 th	April 27 th May 12 th	5

Meteor source is the BAA Handbook

Roy Gooding

OCCULTATIONS DURING APRIL 2000

The table lists stellar occultations which occur during the month under favourable circumstances. The data relates to Orwell Park Observatory, but will be similar at nearby locations.

D or R	Date & Time (UT)	Lunar Phase	Sun Alt (°)	Star Alt (°)	Min Dist (rad)	Star	Mag
D	09 Apr 22:04	0.31+	-25	20	0.89S	ZC 888	6.0
R	22:30	0.31+	-27	16			
D	09 Apr 22:19	0.31+	-27	18	0.70N	ZC 892	6.7
D	09 Apr 22:43	0.31+	-28	15	0.63N	chi 1 Ori	4.4
R	23:24	0.32+	-30	9			
D	11 Apr 22:26	0.54+	-26	34	0.28N	85 Gem	5.4
D	12 Apr 00:52	0.55+	-28	13	0.95N	ZC 1205	6.3
D	12 Apr 20:14	0.64+	-13	54	0.03N	ZC 1321	6.7

James Appleton

G B AIRY'S COUNTRY RETREAT

By Ken Goward

It's no secret, perhaps, that whilst I'm always pleased to view whatever is on offer in the eyepieces at Orwell Park, my main source of pleasure in the wonderful science of astronomy comes from the occasional study of its rich and colourful history.

That pleasure was compounded last summer when Mr Ed O'Sullivan visited our observatory to progress his enquiries into a former owner of his cottage, 'Airy's', Church Lane, Playford. The former owner being no less a person than Sir George Biddell Airy (7th Astronomer Royal)! That Wednesday evening passed all too quickly discussing Airy, his links to this corner of East Anglia, Orwell Park and his many scientific achievements. Ed has no links with our science or hobby and certainly didn't purchase the cottage because of its history. All he knew when the purchase was made in 1997 was that the estate agent had said, "Some famous scientist was supposed to have lived there". Since moving in Ed has spent many hours and much green crinkly stuff restoring the property from what the agent had euphemistically described as 'in need of some attention' to a comfortable and modern family home which retains much of the flavour of its Victorian design.

Following that fascinating meeting I sent off a package of Airy information to Ed and, at length, was delighted to receive an invitation back from him to visit the cottage. Thus, in November I was privileged to make that visit and was treated to a most interesting tour of the place, which still has much of Airy's influence pervading, and the adjacent St Mary's Church where the Airy family is buried and where one may see many mementoes of the locally prominent Biddell family.

The visit afforded me the chance to photograph the cottage inside and out for the information of Dr Allan Chapman who, members will know, has kindly undertaken to visit our society in the near(ish) future to deliver a lecture on Airy. Anyone who has ever been privileged to hear Allan lecture will know what a real treat awaits us. Dr Chapman has, for some time now, been researching Airy with the intention of writing his biography* and has full access to both the Greenwich archive and the Airy family papers. Indeed, Allan has told me that the family papers alone take up in excess of thirty feet of shelf space - such was the prodigious output from the 7th Astronomer Royal! Our lecture Co-Ordinator, Peter Richards, is arranging Dr Chapman's visit and his job was made easier by Ed's very kind invitation to put Allan up at the cottage when he eventually comes here - a classic case of the old carrot & stick approach. Dr Chapman has since said that the photographs "are enormously informative and give a wonderful sense of the place".

Personally, I'd always regarded my photographic ability as only slightly along from moron level but, assuming Allan wasn't just being charitable, perhaps OASI members would appreciate a small taste of them and of the history of Airy's cottage. That pre supposes that the photocopier plays ball. If the repro quality is poor, I'll be happy to show the pictures first hand to anyone who may be interested.

* After his death, Airy's eldest son Wilfred (engineer and designer of the Orwell Park Observatory) collated many of his father's private papers & notes into an autobiography (in loose terms) which was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1896.

Although Northumbrian by birth, Sir George spent the great bulk of his formative years in what may loosely be described as our (OASI's) patch e.g. around Ipswich and Colchester. His uncle, Arthur Biddell, owned Luck's Farm at Playford (over the past 180 years since then the farm name has mutated to Lux) and was Airy's greatest influence. In many ways Airy can be looked upon as the first truly professional British Astronomer, having no independent income to live on and having to 'sell' his services to his employers at what we would describe as 'the rate for the job'.. His meteoric career had brought forth increasing financial reward and, having become Astronomer Royal at Greenwich in 1835, he began to look for a base around his beloved Playford to provide an occasional retreat for his family from the pressures of life at the Royal Observatory. By the early 1840's he had purchased a small cottage in Church Lane which could be traced back to Elizabethan times. With his wife, Richarda, Airy set about designing a huge extension to the premises and was able to move into the place around 1848(ish).



Above. Airy's cottage, showing the large extension he designed with Richarda. The original Tudor part of the building is to the rear of the porch. From study of the 19th century autobiography, it is apparent that although Sir George's travels took him to many parts of the UK and Europe, he would retreat as often as possible to Playford and almost never missed spending the whole of the festive season there.

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Above. A view of the house and the adjacent St Marys Church. The tree to the left of the picture is a London Plane and anecdotal evidence has it that Airy, himself, planted the tree from a sapling obtained at Greenwich.



Above. The charming Airy family sitting room with its panoramic windows.

6

The Airys completely modernised the cottage, effectively doubling its size by the addition of a beautiful sitting room with panoramic windows, extra bedrooms, 'modern' plumbing and servants accommodation at basement level. Those extra bedrooms were needed for a large Victorian family and, although his reputation at Greenwich was almost ogre like, Airy loved children and sired nine, of which Wilfred (our observatory builder *b 1836 d 1925*) was the fourth eldest. There is a slight sadness about the place, in the sense that Victorian infant mortality took its toll and five of the nine died in childhood. Indeed two of the children succumbed to Scarlet fever within a fortnight of each other. Hardly had the Airys returned to Greenwich after the first bereavement before they were back at Playford for a second funeral. The full poignancy of this comes home to one if you visit the family burial plot and see the five small headstones in front of the adult graves.



Above. The Airy/Biddell family tomb in the churchyard at Playford. Sir George and Richard's grave is to the extreme left and the dates of birth and death are recorded in 'astronomer speak' E.g - year first - 'Born 1801 July 27th'. Wilfred's headstone is the second from the right. Note the five children's headstones in the foreground.

Richard Airy died in the Astronomer Royal's home at Greenwich in 1875 and was laid to rest at Playford. Sir George retained the cottage and continued to use it as his retreat. He retired as Astronomer Royal in 1881 and maintained a residence at Greenwich (The White House). His sojourns to Playford were used as times of quiet study and to write his many

scientific papers. Amongst a myriad list of interests to occupy his retirement, he was also an acknowledged expert in Roman Britain and wrote a groundbreaking paper on the Roman invasion of Britain published in Nature, April 1887. He died at his Greenwich home in January 1892 and was buried at Playford. The cottage then passed to Wilfred, the eldest surviving son. Upon his death it passed to his only child (Anna) who lived there until her death in 1964. After that the cottage was sold out of family ownership. Anna Airy became an artist of some note and a number of her military paintings hang in the Imperial War museum. She was reputed to be very much the granddaughter of Sir George, with a seemingly abrasive attitude and - below the crust - a heart of gold.



Standing on the adjacent rise above the house is St Mary's Church and Airy became much involved in its various activities. Evidence of the tenacity of the man can be found today inside the church in the form of a 12th century brass of a knight by the name of Felbrigge (No connection with Felbrig Hall, Norfolk). The figure was originally set into the church floor and had been damaged by countless generations of footprints. Airy conducted a forty year battle with the Church of England to have the brass taken up and eventually mounted on the wall. It seems that he fell out with at least four of the ministers incumbent during that time! Also to be viewed are various plaques commemorating members of the Airy/Biddell family and (left) a splendid bust of the 7th Astronomer Royal below which is a memorial plaque to Wilfred that was commissioned by his daughter. As Wilfred is of particular relevance to OASI, I'll repeat the wording of that memorial;

*In constant memory of Wilfred Airy. Eldest son of Sir George Biddell Airy KCB
Astronomer Royal and Richarda his wife. Born Sept 19 1836 at the Royal Greenwich
Observatory. Married Apr 27 1881 Anna, younger daughter of Professor Listing of
Gottingen. Died at Playford Oct 8th 1925.*

The reference to Wilfred's father in law being one Professor Listing of Gottingen is intriguing. Sir George was very much a 'European' and always made great efforts to establish links with other observatories and astronomers on the continent. Gottingen Observatory was one of ten major such facilities in Germany during the 19th century and Airy was a great admirer of the accuracy of star catalogues derived from their observations. I would speculate that Listing was an astronomer there? However, from my own collection of astronomy history books, I cannot find a reference to him and that notion has still to be researched.

Leaving aside discussion on the potential ghoulishness or otherwise of reading gravestones, should you have an hour or two to kill one sunny afternoon, why not pay a visit to Playford and stroll around the church (keys obtainable from the adjacent rectory) and see for yourself the mementoes of the Airy/Biddell family. Please remember, though, that Airy's Cottage is a private family home. Sir George Biddell Airy once said, "There is no county in England better than Suffolk". Playford, therefore, is a fitting final resting place for, arguably, the greatest of the Astronomers Royal.

Allan Chapman, in his forthcoming OASI lecture, (likely to be in the Spring of next year) will elucidate the life and times of Airy in ways light years beyond anything these scribbings can ever hope to. In the meantime, this small offering on a local astronomer hero may serve as an entrée.

KG

Sources:

- Dr Allan Chapman. Ed O'Sullivan. OASI members William Barton & Peter Richards.*
- The Victorian Amateur Astronomer Author Allan Chapman Wiley Praxis 1998*
- The Royal Greenwich Observatory Author WH Merea National Maritime Museum 1975*
- The Autobiography of Sir George Biddell Airy Edited by W Airy Cambridge University Press 1896*
- The Airy family Tree, researched by E Satterhwaite*
- Extract from Nature, April 1887, courtesy of the British Library*

2000 COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN	D Payne
SECRETARY & WORK PARTY ORGANISER	R Gooding
TREASURER	K Goward
MECHANICS	M Cook
NEWSLETTER CO-ORDINATOR	E Sims
BEGINNERS MEETING CO-ORD	T Sampson
DARK SKIES & VISIT CO-ORD	G Coleman
EQUIPMENT CURATOR	J Walsh
LIBRARIAN	J Appleton

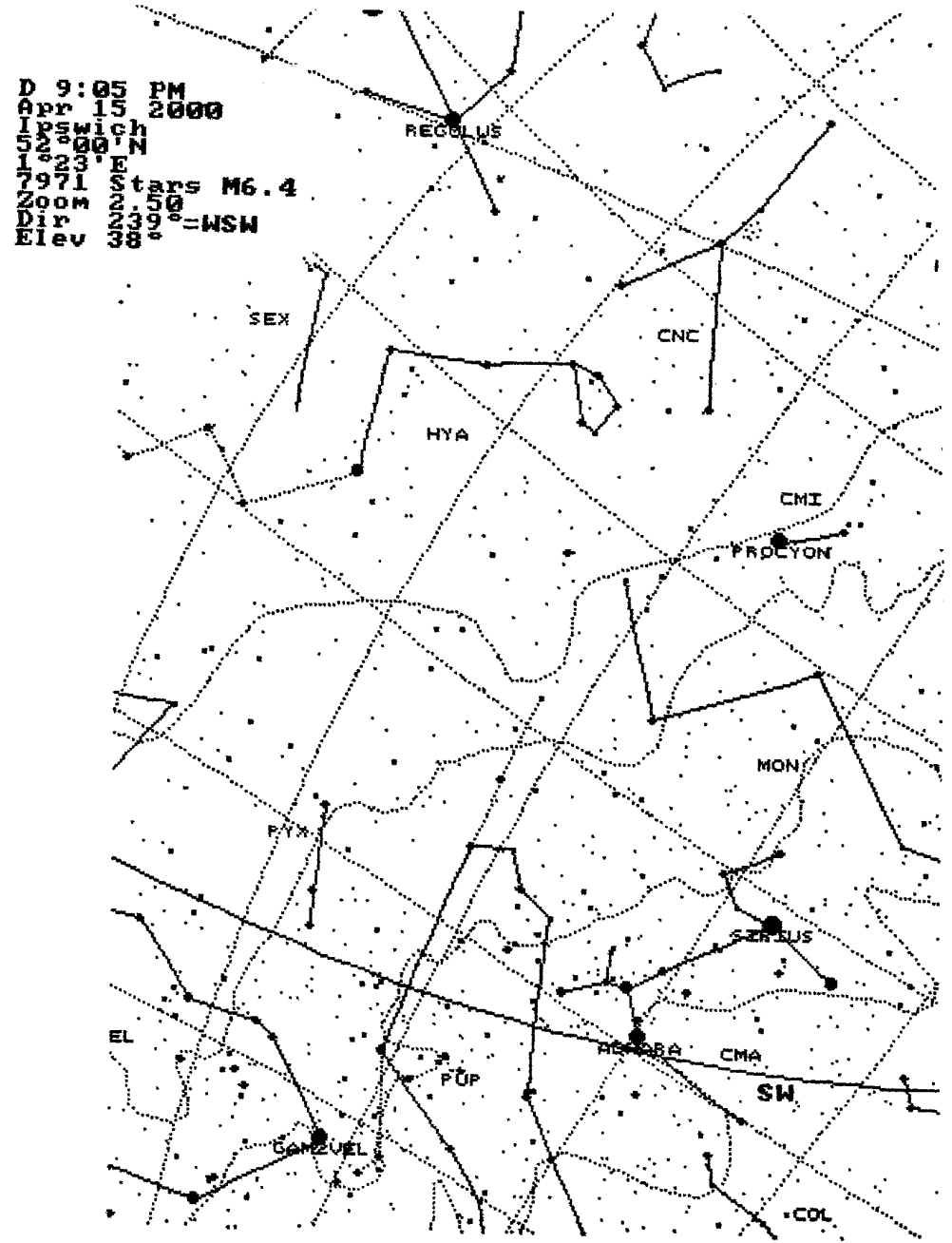
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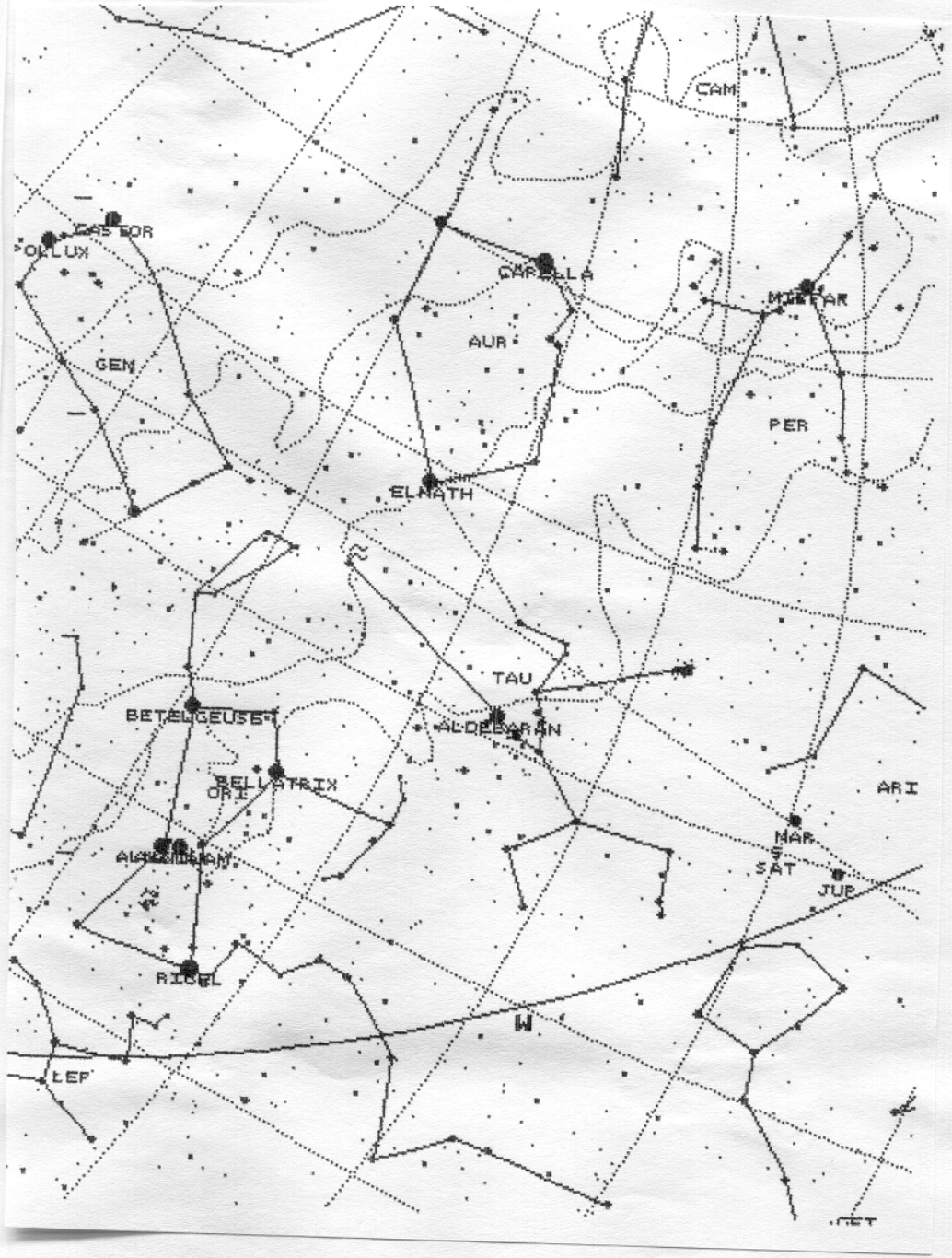
CO-OPTED MEMBER	
LECTURE CO-ORDINATOR	P Richards

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CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS R Gooding OASI Secretary
[redacted] Ipswich Suffolk IP1 6AE

MEMBERSHIP M. Cook [redacted] Ipswich IP4 5PZ





Observing Programme For April

Dates	Observing Director	Activities
Mondays from 7.30pm	T Sampson	General Observation
Tuesdays from 7.30pm	G Coleman	Group Visits
Wednesdays from 8.00pm	M Cook D Payne	Nebular & Faint Objects
Thursdays from 7.30pm	G Coleman	Group Visits
Fridays from 7.30pm		Double Stars

All members are welcome on any night, but on nights other than Wednesday please check with the appropriate director that the observatory will be open.

Special Events

1. Committee Meeting

The next committee meeting is going to be held on Saturday 8th April in the club room at the observatory at 7.30pm. All members are welcome to attend.

2. Workshop

Wednesday April 12th 7.30pm. Astrophotography.

3. Lecture Meeting

Friday 19th May at the Friends Meeting House Fonnereau Road, 8.00pm
Twinkle Twinkle Little (Neutron) Star. A talk by Paul Roche from the National Space Science Centre.

Society Contact Details

	Home Phone	Work Phone
Chairman	D Payne	
Secretary	R Gooding	

Contact details for the full committee are inside the back page.

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 WWW address: <http://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/~ipswich/>