

Highlands Astronomical Society (HAS) was formed in **1994** after the merger of the Moray Astronomical Society and the Inverness Astronomical Society, which was founded a year earlier by Jim Savage-Lowden, who became Chairman. The Society occasionally used the car park at Culloden Battlefield as an observing site and the first public observing session occurred here in **1996**. Meetings were informal until **1997** when the first programme was developed by our secretary at the time, James Dick.

In **1999** Abriachan was suggested as a location for an observatory. In **2000**, Maarten de Vries designed our first website and Pauline Macrae became Chairwoman when Jim Savage-Lowden retired. In **2001**, a rotating shed with a 10" telescope was purchased from the estate of a Mr. Don Smith and after much discussion it was decided to locate the observatory at Culloden Battlefield, for which we received temporary planning permission by the National Trust for Scotland, instead of Abriachan. The mirror of a telescope donated by the Abbey at Fort Augustus was used in a Dobsonian telescope built by members Maarten de Vries, Antony McEwan and Rob Nuttall.

In **2002**, Membership increased and, as awareness of HAS grew, more of the public attended observing sessions and more organisations asked for talks. Members also began writing a monthly column for the local paper and the first joint public event with Moray's Astronomy Club, Sigma, took place in Elgin with a visit from Dr Mark Sims from Leicester University talking about the Mars Beagle lander. The rotating shed was renovated by members this year and then opened as our observatory in **2003**. It was named after Jim who had died suddenly the year before. Due to increasing membership we moved from the Spectrum Centre to the Green House. Light pollution is a major concern and the Society submitted evidence of it in our area to the Government.

2004 was the 10th anniversary of HAS which was celebrated with a trip to the Glasgow Science Centre. The National Trust for Scotland offered HAS a permanent site on their land and Rob Nuttall began the drawings for the new observatory. In **2005**, HAS helped at the first science festival for children, the first Going Nova event in Forres and hosted the Scottish Astronomers Group Weekend in Inverness. Colin Donaldson, a junior member, gained high enough marks to win him a place at Space School in Houston, Texas.

The Society became a registered charity in **2006**, the design for the new observatory was settled and fund raising began. By the end of **2007** we had raised over £65,000, planning permission and the building warrant had been granted, and John Gilmour took on the responsibility for managing the observatory project as well as becoming Chairman when Pauline stepped down.

In **2008**, the permanent Jim Savage-Lowden Observatory, housing a Meade 14" LX200R telescope, became a reality and was opened on the longest day by the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Professor John Brown. The Rt Hon Charles Kennedy, MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, and the Provost of Inverness were also present. A total of around £75,000 had been raised from a variety of sponsors including Highland 2007, Awards for All, Highland Council Common Good Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Diageo, LifeScan, Robertson Trust, Co-operative Dividend Fund and the members. A Gaelic television programme about astronomy, and featuring members from HAS, was aired during the summer.

2009 was the Year of Astronomy and the Society, along with the new observatory, organised a mini science festival and became 'Saturn' as part of Glasgow's Science Centre's activity to show true scale distance between the planets. Our venue changed to the Smithton-Culloden Free Church, with Maarten briefly and then Eric Walker taking over as Chairman. In **2010** the Observatory was enriched with a Lunt solar telescope which started the Solar Saturday events and we increased our outreach activities.

The BBC's Stargazing Live programme early in **2011** (and the following year), created an immense interest in astronomy and opening our observatory proved very popular to the public. Many schools and youth groups continue to request talks but are now also asking to visit the observatory. Arthur Milnes became Chairman and Niamh became our youngest member at just ten to achieve her bronze Messier challenge award. We acquired our 100th member in **2012**. The Internet connection for the observatory was finally established and a new and larger monitor was bought using funding from Lifescan.

Throughout **2013 and 2014**, the observatory continued to be popular with schools and youth organisations, and public events were always busy. **2014** is our 20th anniversary and it was celebrated with a cake at the April AGM.