

Cape Cod Astronomical Society

Minutes of the December 6, 2012 meeting

Attendance: Total: 25 Members: 21 Guests: 4

President Mike Hunter opened the meeting at 7:35 P.M. and welcomed members and guests.

The first speaker for the evening was Hugh Blair-Smith. The title for the presentation was; "Historical Errors in Navigational Chronometry in Patrick O'Brien's Aubrey-Maturin Sea Stories".

Hugh has lectured at CCAS previously and has an extensive knowledge of navigation through his career at NASA and as instructor with the Cape Cod Sail and Power Squadron. The stories cover the period from 1800-1815. The following is an introduction from Hugh Blair-Smith: Certain of the historical novels of Patrick O'Brien, featuring the characters of Captain Jack Aubrey and Dr. Stephen Maturin, sometimes (though not consistently) mis-state navigational practice and the condition of navigational chronometry at the time of the Napoleonic wars. The whole significance of the chronometry problem, and the "sponsorship" by the Board of Longitude of chronometer development, is missed. Collection of data by observations of solar altitude and lunar distances is represented as yielding results and precisions that could not have been realized. Surprisingly, in a companion volume (*Sea of Words*, not by O'Brien but edited by Dean King), a chapter by John B. Hattendorf on the history of the Royal Navy is flawed by the same errors.

Hugh spoke in great detail regarding technical errors. He also pointed out in layman's terms several of what he called "smoking pistols", such as errors in terminology concerning both distance and time. He then spent time explaining how early navigators used instruments such as chronometers and sextants to sail around the globe.

The second speaker for the evening was Cape Cod Astronomical Director of Research, Bernie Young. Bernie spoke about how we at CCAS can become involved in meaningful scientific research. CCAS is a fully functioning observatory with multiple high quality observing instruments, including automated 16 and 18 inch telescopes and several digital cameras. The following is a summary of possible categories for research:

---Occultations of double stars

---Asteroid occultations

---Lunar meteor impacts

---Asteroid Astrometry

---Atmosphere of Pluto

---Jovian extinction events

---Lunar grazes

Business Meeting

Observatory Director Joel Burnett presented an award to the previous Director Mike Hunter for his years of service as Director.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Burke