



# MEXBOROUGH & SWINTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

## Press Release

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## Star Gazers Mark Silver Jubilee

(For immediate release)

A local astronomical society will be celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on May 17th.

From its inception in 1978, membership of the Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society has grown from just four to over 50. At first the Society used several venues, but now has permanent headquarters in its own room at Swinton Working Mens' Club.

Over the years this room has been extended and modified; now boasting an extensive library, a comfortable meeting area, and state-of-the-art projection equipment which includes facilities for projecting slides, videos and DVDs.

A big boost for the Society came in 1989 when in a national astronomical quiz they trounced the opposition, including Cambridge University. The final, held in London and chaired by Patrick Moore, the doyen of amateur astronomers, saw them carry off the silver salver and a £500 cheque.

This provided the initial funding for building their own observatory, which is situated close to Hooper Stand near Wentworth, Rotherham. All the work, from concreting and bricklaying to joinery and electrics, was done by the members themselves. Subsequently the Society members have designed and built a huge dome to completely replace the leaky original. The observatory houses an 18-inch reflecting telescope – the largest in South Yorkshire.

“Since the observatory opened in May 1993 hundreds of people have attended our public viewing evenings,” said Society Chairman Les Marsden. “It’s wonderful how much interest there is in astronomy. We threw the observatory open when the comet Hale-Bopp appeared in 1997 and were astonished at the public’s response: more than 800 people visited over two evenings.”

The Society isn’t confined to its HQ and observatory – members often go out and give talks and slide-shows to a wide range of organisations, including schools.

The occasion will be celebrated with a special meeting followed by a slap-up dinner. Guest speakers will include Paul Money who is well known for his TV and radio appearances, Dennis Ashton who runs the Sheffield Star Centre and a mobile planetarium, and Dr. Allan Chapman of Oxford University, an expert on the history of astronomy and whose new Channel 4 series is soon to be broadcast.

**Ends**

### Background Information

The celebrations will take place at Swinton Working Mens' Club starting at 12.30 p.m. on 17 May. Photographers will be welcome.

For further information please visit the Society’s website at <http://www.msas.org.uk>.