

ASSA Instrumentation Section Report – July 2023

Activities of the Instrumentation Section continue to largely revolve around communication, outreach, guidance and education, plus the important aspect of encouraging people in the pursuit of their personal instrumentation projects. There is no drive to formally induct members into the Section. Rather, the approach is to address ASSA members' ad-hoc needs for information on a case-by-case basis.

In support of the Society's general communication efforts, which equally support the instrumentation Section's goals, activities in the following media are ongoing:

- FaceBook pages
 - ASSA national FaceBook page
 - Telescope Making SA
 - Amateur Telescope Making
- Telescope Making Class WhatsApp group
- .IO group mail lists

The Section directly supports the needs of both ASSA members and the general public regarding selection, construction, purchase, maintenance and use of instrumentation. This is mostly done via the Amateur Telescope Making (ATM) class, the FaceBook pages, e-mail correspondence, telephonic discussion, and WhatsApp/SMS.

The distinctly South African "Telescope Making SA" Facebook group attracts members from around the world. International involvement produces an energetic flow of ideas, information, technical assistance and encouragement. Some of the (at times unusual) approaches to instrumentation developed locally have, after being highlighted in this medium, been favorably received and copied abroad. Prospective members are vetted prior to admitting them to the group and appropriate behaviour is gently but firmly enforced. At the time of writing, the Telescope Making SA Facebook page currently has 1,075 members, an increase of 59 since the last report. Since FB have restricted the more detailed information previously enjoyed, due to heightened data privacy legislation globally, it is no longer possible to provide a detailed breakdown of the demographic. The international "Amateur Telescope Making" group of which the author is also an administrator, currently boasts a worldwide membership of 8642.

The ATM class has been continuously active since July-1991, with expertise, materials and components freely shared for individuals' projects. Physical classes are ongoing, subject to rare intermittent interruptions due to school activities where we meet. Members come and go according to their needs and available time, work at their own pace on individual projects, and sometimes return after a long hiatus dictated by personal circumstances. The class is run informally in a flexible manner to accommodate the vagaries of members' lives. Consequently, there is no easy way to ascertain the actual numbers of people or projects engaged in at any one time. However, a handful of newcomers are making good progress on their first instruments, whilst others are continuing their projects. Membership of ASSA, whilst encouraged, is not a prerequisite for participation in the ATM class. A class register is kept as an indication of activity levels, but signing it is not enforced. Recorded attendance remains steady at 6-12 people per week. Apart from the Facebook interactions, there has been limited exchange of e-mails, phone calls and WhatsApp messaging.

Novel components continue to be produced, with 3D printed parts now the norm. Again, several eyepieces were constructed from salvaged optics and distributed pro bono to worthy candidates. Unfortunately supplies of such objects are dwindling, so anyone with "junk" optics of any kind is invited to donate same in order to continue supporting the community. An old 5" telescope on a basic equatorial mount was acquired, refurbished, and donated to an enthusiastic Girl Guide, where it is seeing use and helping to promote youthful interest in astronomy. A sophisticated Foucault tester is underway, sporting a high quality camera which should at times help in a group setting.

Overall, the foregoing indicates a continuing healthy level of activity and interest.

--- Chris Stewart