

The 24-Inch Newtonian Telescope in Sherwood Observatory

PICTURE: MANSFIELD AND SUTTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY



By OLI PRIDMORE

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STAR-GAZERS are being offered a glimpse through time as a Mansfield telescope that was formerly a searchlight in the Second World War will be on view to the public.

The 24-inch telescope at the Mansfield and Sutton Astronomical Society was built by its founding members in the 1970s, and its mirror is believed to have been sourced from a Ministry of Defence warehouse after being used in the war.

Now, in the society's third public open evening of the season, people are being offered the chance to glimpse through the historical telescope and look to the moon in an event centred around galaxies.

David Collins, 79, the founder of the society, explained that he established it after attending a night class on astronomy led by Horace Barnett, who has an observatory named after him in Chesterfield.

David said: "It was obvious to Horace that I knew more about astronomy than the others in the class and he asked if I'd ever considered setting up a society in Mansfield."

Soon after, the society's first meeting was held in the February of 1970, and 16 years later its observatory was opened by Astronomer Royal at the time, Sir Francis Graham Smith.

It wasn't until an infamous comet appeared in the night sky during the mid-90s that the public aspect of the society began to take off.

The Comet Hale-Bopp was first discovered in 1995 and when it appeared in the skies above Nottinghamshire, David publicised the observatory telescope on Blue Peter.

David said: "Because of that, we had people coming from as far as South Wales and Kent."

"It's been absolutely wonderful seeing how the popularity of the

society has grown."

The event on Saturday, November 17 will take place at the society's Sherwood Observatory in Sutton in Ashfield, and will also feature "radio astronomy", where people can listen to a meteor in real time, as well as rolling talks on galaxies throughout the evening.

Brendan Scoular, events coordinator at the society, said: "We offer a lot more to the public than most astronomical societies."

"I think science and astronomy has always captured people's imaginations, particularly the young. There is always something happening in the night sky and fortunately we're here to capitalise on that."

■ The event begins at 6.45pm at the Sherwood Observatory and tickets are £5 for adults and £1 for under 16s (with an adult). Further details can be found at: www.sherwood-observatory.org.uk.

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