



Following on from last years successful Stargazing Live television show, Professor Brian Cox and Dara O'Briain were back on our screens again this year for another three days of Stargazing shows. This was broadcast on BBC Two from 16th to 18th January and attracted record viewing figures for a science program.

As well as the live television shows, the BBC put on events around the UK throughout January and as the NIAAS is now an official BBC partner, we were out and about with them!

On Saturday 14th January, we where in Derry/Londonderry for the BBC Big Screen Stargazing Live Event. This started at 12 noon in Waterloo Place near Guildhall Square. From 1pm to 2pm there was a live feed on the big screen from the Faulkes Telescope, Hawaii and from 2pm we had members of the public becoming screen stars and trying out the interactive big screen quiz! There were also fun stargazing activities for all the family! BBC presenter Gerry Anderson was the host and was running about talking and interviewing people around the square including NIAAS members! Oh and there was an invasion of Star Wars Storm Troopers getting pictures taken with the kids.

This was a very enjoyable day for all, with many people stopping to chat with our members and looking at their telescopes, we were even able to get some public solar observing in.





Then on Wednesday 18th January, the NIAAS were back at the Armagh Planetarium, for another action packed night of activities. Many of you came along to this successful event last year and this year was even better as the Planetarium opened its doors again.

### **Report from the Planetarium:**

*As the evening progressed we waited on baited breath to see if the clouds would stay clear to allow us to view the amazing giant gas planet Jupiter and perhaps even catch a glimpse of the Pleiades Star Cluster. As our car park began to fill up and people started to filter into the Planetarium we had a feeling that luck was on our side, and for the second year running we had*

*dry weather, and even better, a clear sky!*

*It was great to see how many children had brought along their telescopes to join in with the viewing and the astronomy experts were very busy answering queries about the night sky and giving advice on the best telescopes to purchase. At many stages during the course of the night huge queues formed to catch a glimpse of Jupiter and some of its Moons that were on display! The ever-helpful NIAAS members braved the chilly January air as they enthused the crowds of on-lookers. If you need any help or advice a great point of contact is their website, packed full of helpful tips and some photographs of their night in Armagh as well at [www.niaas.co.uk](http://www.niaas.co.uk).*

*In addition to all the stargazing that was happening, we also had free theatre shows on offer. To cope with the demand we put on two extra screenings of our new show "Experience the Aurora", totalling four fully packed viewings in total! Our Director, Dr. Tom Mason also provided Meteorite presentations and some lucky people even got to touch a piece of the Moon! For our younger visitors we had an arts and crafts workshop and I seen many rockets blasting off out of the Planetarium to infinity and beyond!*

*As the 400 people who came out to visit us began to head home, the lights went off at the Planetarium. The NIAAS also began to pack up their gear and they headed off into the night, as we reflected on what was an amazing evening, and one that we hope can be repeated again in the future. Many thanks to everyone that turned up and made the night possible and especially to the NIAAS who volunteered their time to show us the wonders of the night sky. In particular I wish to thank Stevie who was instrumental in helping to organise the event, and also to Phil, Simon, Neil, Geraldine, Mia, Jason, Gary, Gilly and Colette who were on hand the whole night with the telescopes.*

*Here's to clear skies in 2012!*





I can't add much to that, but here is what our Chairman Stevie had to say:

*After a superb day in Derry on Saturday, last night at Armagh Planetarium was the icing on the cake. Over 400 members of the public turned up to see the Star shows and the other attractions, and I think I could safely say that nearly every one of them came over and had a look through the telescopes. Yet again, for the second year in a row, we got really lucky with the weather, and Jupiter was visible for almost the whole night. Most people wanted to see Jupiter, but we also had a look at the Pleiades and a couple of other objects. A lot of people took the opportunity to ask questions and a couple brought along their own scopes.*

*Many Thanks to all at Armagh for inviting us along again this year, and especially to Sinead for all her help and enthusiasm and for organizing for us to see the big 16" reflector in its dome. They ended up putting on two extra shows and I know they were delighted with the turnout.*

*Many Thanks also to all the folk from the society who came along on the night, and especially to Phil, Simon, Neil, Geraldine, Mia, Jason, Gary, Gilly and Colette for all their hard work, patience and enthusiasm.*

*From what I have seen and heard, Stargazing Live was an enormous success this year, and I think we in Northern Ireland did particularly well. Quite a few people mentioned they had been*

*at Oxford Island on the Tuesday night and had thoroughly enjoyed it, and I think the fact that they then came out for a second night illustrates the level of interest in astronomy amongst the public. Many people said they had been inspired by last year's programmes to become interested in Astronomy, or to go back to the hobby after previous interest. In my opinion, the programmes themselves were excellent, combining practical subjects like how to choose a telescope with more challenging subjects like Black Holes. The "Back to Earth" section after the main programmes was particularly good.*

*So, once again, Many Thanks to the BBC for taking the initiative and scheduling a series of programmes about our little hobby.*

*Roll on next year.*

**All above images and more from the events can be seen in larger format in our gallery [here](#)**

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