



Minutes for SAGAS Meeting 19th January 2008 at South Downs Planetarium, Chichester

Administered by SAGAS Working Group

Chair Keith Brackenborough

Secretary John Axtell

Treasurer John Stapleton

1. Introduction & Welcome

Keith Brackenborough, SAGAS Working Group Co-ordinator, opened the meeting at 14:15.

1.1. Societies Present

16 Societies attended (a record):

Society	Represented by
Basingstoke	John Stapleton
Brighton & Hove	John Wade
Cody	Phil Alner
Crawley	Neil Morrison
Croydon	Paul Harper
Eastbourne	Keith Brackenborough
East Sussex	Simon Allen
Farnham	Peter Campbell-Burns
Guildford	John Axtell
Hampshire	Dave Harris
Horsham	Richard Griffith
South Downs	Mike Cole
Vectis	Richard Flux
Wadhurst	Mike Wyles
Wessex	Paul Snell
Worthing	Brian Halls

In addition a number of additional members from each society also attended so the total attendance numbered about 36.

1.2 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received

2. Minutes of the October 2007 Meeting and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted by all present. The only comment was a suggestion that future minutes do not use abbreviations for member societies out of context, as there are duplicates.

3. Society Reports

[Secretary's note – I summarise below the main items raised, excepting the various recent visiting speakers which were mentioned. Please forgive any minor omissions or inaccuracies. The first 13 reports were verbal, the last three were supported by PowerPoint presentations, projected using the Planetarium's facilities.]

3.1 Hampshire

HAG now has 160 members and is reviewing its new member strategy. It is considering changing its structure to be a registered charity. It now has a new secretary and has changed its regular meeting to 2nd Friday of the month. It recently organised the Back to Basics event on behalf of the BAA, and attracted 70 delegates

3.2 Croydon

CAS is suffering from having only six committee members to run a club for 67 members. They recently visited Greenwich Observatory. A 10 minute 'Science programme' has been recently introduced as a regular feature of its monthly meetings.

3.3 Cody

CAS has just celebrated its 10th Anniversary. They continue without a Secretary in post. They have arranged to take telescopes for an evening observing session at a local garden centre at Xmas 2008 as a precursor to 2009.

3.4 Brighton & Hove

There has been no change in the BHAS status and there was nothing to report.

3.5 Basingstoke

BAS continues to grow, up by 20% in the last year, now at 50.

3.6 Horsham

HAG is a small group of 26, meeting at Christ's Hospital School. This provides good opportunity for outreach work. They have time booked on the Faulkes Telescope

3.7 Crawley

The president is Nigel Calder, the well known astronomical author. He has a new book out about Climate Change, and will soon be delivering a talk to CAS on this.

3.8 Worthing

A New Year social event has just been held, with a quiz and raffle. They are introducing more Members' Evenings, concentrating on short talks by members about their projects.

3.9 East Sussex

ESAS is a new member of SAGAS and so a longer report allowed their representative to introduce the Society. ESAS was formed only in 2000 and has 50 members, meeting on the 1st Thursday of the month. In August they hold a BBQ. They have built their own dobsonian scope for use by ESAS members. They have an observatory, having been gifted a dome. This is situated in a farmers field, well away from town lighting. It houses a Meade LX90. They are currently seeking help from any other SAGAS members familiar with Mambo, an open source software package for web update.

3.10 South Downs

Being co-located, this group works hand-in-hand with the Planetarium, performing outreach work. There are 150 members. Post-meeting observing sessions can be undertaken from the Planetarium's car park. Anecdotally they hold a pink refractor complete with lipstick holder! ☺

3.11 Wadhurst

This is a small society of just 38 members, from which it proves difficult to form a full committee. They have just celebrated their 10th anniversary with a splendid birthday cake at their November meeting.

3.12 Vectis

The Summer meeting at Vectis had been well received. They held a Sputnik Party in October which was very successful, getting local press coverage and great publicity. They now have 123 members, one of whom has just donated a telescope to the society.

3.13 Eastbourne

The programme secretary had left the post and was proving difficult to replace. They too have just had a telescope donated by a member, a Meade ETX90. They keep their subscription down to £10, despite having a speakers fees/expenses bill of £700 last year. They encourage members to gift-aid their fees, and as a result got £108 back. They have recently introduced a 10 minute What's Up session during their meetings. Library books can now be booked on line.

3.14 Wessex

This was the first of the reports to be supported by a PowerPoint presentation. As this is a brand new member time was taken to outline the history of the club. It can trace its ancestry back to 1948 when Poole AG was founded. Poole then merged with Bournemouth AS in 1970 to form Wessex. The current membership stands at 143, monthly meetings are held at Wimbourne and attendance varies usually between 80 and 100, but has peaked at 120! They are in the process of converting to a charity. Public and society observing sessions are held at Durlleston Head, not far from Swanage. It is here that WAS plans to build an observatory. This is expected to require about £20,000 in funding. They have had one grant request to STFC rejected, but have just submitted another one to the Lottery's Awards for All scheme. The observatory will be situated at the Visitors Centre for Durlleston Country Park. There will be a 10 metre

conduit between the centre and the dome, so that images can be relayed into the centre.

3.15 Farnham

FAS has relocated its meeting venue out of Farnham to Church Crookham. The meeting date has also changed from the 2nd Thursday to the 2nd Tuesday of the month. A forthcoming outreach event is expected to attract 400 boys at a scout camp. One of the members is seeking to promote interest in variable stars. FAS is fast establishing an excellent reputation for the quality of imaging done by its members, and a stunning example (Rosette nebula) was shown by way of illustration.

3.16 Guildford

GAS continues to grow its membership at a healthy rate, there are now 89 paid-up members, with an average meeting attendance of 60. There have been two main activities of late. One is the ongoing yet ambitious training programme which so far has put 45 members through training in the use of the observatory's equipment, including a CCD set-up. This was used to good effect to capture some splendid images of Comet 17P Holmes. False colour images had also been taken to show structural detail. A recent lesson learned was to rabbit-proof cables – the USB lead from camera to computer had run under the floor and had been chewed through! The second main activity was the carrying out of a survey into members' experience levels, interest areas, and expectations of the society. The response rate had been very high and the resulting analysis would definitely influence the future strategy for GAS.

4. **SAGAS Working Group**

Keith Brackenborough introduced this subject by saying that over the last year we had seen a revitalisation of SAGAS. We have now grown to 25 members and as such are the largest area group in the country.

4.1. Election/re-election of WG members

Although there was no formal constitution, the Working Group had been in existence for almost one year, and so felt that they ought to offer themselves for re-election, and to offer the opportunity for others to stand. As there were no other nominations, the Working Group was unanimously voted back in *en bloc*.

4.2. Funding

John Axtell itemised the elements of annual expenditure as follows:

- 3 hirings of the Planetarium @ £40
- eventual web hosting cost @ £50
- Keith's travel to FAS Council meetings @ £60
- Incidental photocopying costs for events such as Herstmonceux @ £30

These, plus miscellaneous expenses, could be well covered by a relatively low annual charge levied across all member societies. John proposed a

figure of £15 per year per society, to be revised as the need arose. All present voted in favour of this, with no objections.

4.3. Treasurer

If we are to hold funds then the Working Group will need an officer to manage those monies. Keith invited anyone to volunteer, but at the time there were no offers. [Secretary's note – subsequent to the meeting we are delighted to announce that Brian Halls of Worthing AS has agreed to join the Working Group as Treasurer – many thanks Brian!]

5. **Rotation of Societies to chair SAGAS meetings**

Keith Brackenborough explained that Brighton have kindly volunteered to host the next meeting in April. Cody had similarly volunteered to handle October's, but have asked to postpone until January 09. Keith then requested a society to volunteer to administer the October meeting and was very pleased to accept the offer made by East Sussex. John Axtell suggested that the Working Group should draw up and publish a provisional rota, covering all 25 members, but taking into account those who have just or are about to take the chair. This means at worst over a year's notice to the first on that rota, and at best 6 year's notice to the society drawn last. Everyone present was in agreement. This rota will of course need revision to reflect the level of membership and also the fact that some member societies will be volunteering to host the Summer Event.

6. **Isle of Wight Star Party**

Stephen Griffith reported that there were 40 expressions of interest lodged via the star party website. He was pleased that so many societies and other websites had placed mention and/or links to the star party and its website, including *Astronomy Now* and the Society for Popular Astronomy. There will be an advert in the March edition of *Astronomy Now*. There will be a raffle plus an astro-jumble sale. They have some talks identified already, but would be keen to have a few more volunteers. Some Trade Stands have been identified – Widescreen centre, Venturescope and Island Planetarium. The visit to the rocket testing site near The Needles will have to be limited to around 30 people, as it is on National Trust land. The Brighstone Centre will provide cooked breakfast until late morning. In addition there is a campers' kitchen that star party guests will be able to use. The organisers will provide a guide to local shops and pubs. [Secretary's Note – Booking has now started, the booking form can be downloaded from either the SAGAS or IOW Star party web sites]

7. **Main Summer Meeting 2008 – Basingstoke**

John Stapleton reported that this event will be held at Cliddesden Primary School, which is used by BAS for their regular monthly meetings. Their usual room can hold 60, but larger rooms are available if needs be. A cold buffet will be provided. Doors will open at 13.00 for a formal start at 13.30. True Technology and Aurora Books will mount Trade Stands, as might Venturescope. Guy Hurst (of *The Astronomer*) will be one of three speakers.

Closing time will be around 18.30.

8. International Year of Astronomy 2009

So far the main SAGAS plan is for a rolling road show. This will be a sidewalk-astronomy type of event, that can be 'carried' by one society then passed to the next. Display Boards and other materials (PPT Presentations, leaflets, etc) will be produced to be shared around. Another suggestion from John Stapleton was that local societies should investigate any planned local shows, festivals, fetes that are to take place in 2009. The idea is that the crowd will already be there, and so we can capitalise on that with daytime solar viewing etc. He asked that if any member societies formulate plans or suggestions that they should involve him.

9. Any Other Business

Dave Woods requested items for the SAGAS Reporter. He is planning to feature two societies per issue – one small, one large. He requested that meeting delegates should promote the eZine to their memberships. One item he hopes to create is a Speakers List for our region.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at the South Downs Planetarium on 19th April 2008, and will be chaired by Brighton & Hove AS.

End of Formal Business

There was a BREAK for refreshments.

John Stapleton collected £2.50 from each attending society to cover the cost of the Planetarium hire.

As Keith had to depart early John Axtell took the chair, in order to introduce John Murrell, who delivered a fascinating talk entitled "Everything you wanted to know about Pulsars, but were too afraid to ask". A synopsis of this talk will appear in the next issue of The SAGAS Reporter.