



Minutes for SAGAS Meeting 18th October 2008

at South Downs Planetarium, Chichester

Administered by East Sussex Astronomical Society

Chair David Pulley

Secretary Simon Allen

1. Introduction & Welcome

David Pulley, East Sussex's new chairman, opened the meeting at 14:15.

1.1. Societies Present

18 Societies attended (a new record!):

Society	Represented by
Adur	Brian Halls
Basingstoke	John Stapleton
Brighton & Hove	Name not recorded
Cody	Phil Alner
Crawley	Neil Morrison
Croydon	Paul Harper
Eastbourne	Name not recorded
East Sussex	Simon Allen
Guildford	John Axtell
Hampshire	David Harris
Horsham	Richard Griffith
Solent	Ken Medway
Southdowns	Jan Whittington
Vectis	Richard Flux
Wadhurst	Mike Wyles
Wealden	Chris Ellis
Wessex	Bob Mizon
Worthing	Graham Boots

In addition a number of additional members from several societies also attended so the total attendance exceeded 30.

1.2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies from Ashford and Farnham had been received by the SAGAS Secretary

2. Minutes of the October 2007 Meeting and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted by all present.

3. Society Reports

3.1 Ashford

Martin Helmsley had submitted a written report which was read by the chairman. Ashford was formed 2½ years ago with nine regular members as there was a lack of a local group for the Ashford area. For the last six months the society has been holding monthly meetings. Membership increased over the summer to 19 members. The Society held a stand at a local fair. The Society is running a six week early evening course suitable for children. The Society has also received publicity on the local radio. By the end of the year the Society had grown to 25 to 28 members

3.2 Basingstoke

An adult educational course was being run. Telescopes were made available to schools. Plans were in place for IYA 2009.

3.3 Brighton

There was no official report from Brighton, but other delegates gave the glad news that John Ward was now getting increasingly better following his recent illness. Brighton now has an ongoing lecture programme.

3.4 Cody

Season commenced 1st September 2008. Membership stands between 39 to 46 of which an average of 25 attend the monthly meetings. They are running a basic astronomy course. For outreach they have planned a Christmas exhibition at a local garden centre for the public to ask questions. Lee McDonald will give a talk on Isaac Newton telescope.

3.5 Crawley

Crawley held its AGM the previous night. President of the Society is Nigel Calder. The Society had planned to watch the lunar eclipse but was clouded out like most societies in the south. A talk by Dr. Robert Smith from Sussex University is planned for 21 November 2008. Title "The Distant Future of the Earth".

3.6 Croydon

The Society has 80 signed up members. The Society is involved with local schools both primary and secondary. The Society has arranged for CRB checks for its members who run these events.

3.7 East Sussex

Currently 50 members. Mainly outreach events program focusing on beginners. Social events included. Aims for the coming year was a Moon watch at the De La Warr pavilion, proposed Solar System Walk to link with Bexhill rejuvenation program for Bexhill Seafront. Society emphasis has shifted to be more beginner-focused. Aims - Increase membership by a diverse selection of speakers, pursuing remote control of the society telescope. Increase membership to 100.

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 Guildford

The risk to its dark sky observing site has been alleviated as a result of planning restrictions placed on an oil drilling company that had planned to flare off at night. A grant application has been made to the Royal Astronomical Society totalling £3,500. The shopping list is Stallacam, projector and screen, monitor and a Coronado PST. Several IYA 2009 events were planned including "She is an astronomer" celebrating the contribution to astronomy by females over the years. The providing University of Guildford is co-hosting the event which is aimed at schools, from GCSE upwards. During the Weekend of 6th March 2009 1000 scouts meet in a tri-district event at Hampton estate and the society will be providing an observing session. Guildford are also involved in the organisation of the UK Space Conference 2009 at Charterhouse School where one of the themes will again be "She is an astronomer." Charterhouse has its own observatory and there will be a Star Party. Social events over the summer have included a skittle match and summer barbecue. Five members attended the Kelling Heath Star Party. The refurbishment of the society's observatory is nearly complete. The society's first beginners' course took place on 16th October 2008 with 12 beginners and 4 tutors.

3.11 Hampshire

Membership totals at some 160 although the active observing membership is only about 20 to 25% of this total. Recent images include Noctilucent Clouds, various asteroids, Saturn, Jupiter, and there is continuing involvement with the Lunar 100. Several new members are under training at the Wednesday night Observing Sessions. A new robust Constitution was adopted without change at the recent AGM. HAG has continued with its successful monthly ticketed "Open Evening" visits which regularly draw in some 30 members of the public. The events are generally sold out several months in advance and attendance is good even on cloudy nights. There are also a large number of private visits, almost one per week, which also helps with Groups funds. The monthly talks at the local Memorial Hall generally attract an audience of between 40 and 80 people and increasingly include members of the public attending them. Local and county councils grants have allowed the installation of CCTV cameras and a recorder in order to help with site security. The images are available to some members over the web in order that any alarm can be investigated from home and the police advised if needed. The recent AGM re-elected the former officers of the Group and although there has been some changes to the committee there are no changes to points of contact. There is a significant programme in support of the IYA and there will be a celebration our 30th anniversary of the opening of the first dome at the Clanfield site in November. The HAG News Magazine is published on the society website within the members' area, however there is also a very limited circulation of the printed version for members who do not have web access.

3.12 Horsham

The Society has 48 active members. One member travelled to Siberia fro the recent Total Solar Eclipse. John Axtell gave a talk on "Happy Birthday Sputnik."

The Society plans an outreach programme for IYA 2009 which will include a visit to Aronside school and side walk astronomy.

3.13 Solent

Solent meets of 13th of each month. The Society has 65 members with an attendance of 35 members at meetings. The Society has a 14" Meade which is used on the first Sunday of each month. This was funded by the National Lottery. The Society also does Scout visits. AGM is being held the following week. Project to observe the grazing occultation on 7th January 2009. The Society also has a 5" refractor which will be used for this event. The Society has successfully imaged the Crown Nebula. The Society has regular visits from Scouts and is open every week. In November members will be running a workshop on how to start observing. It will begin by finding your way around the night sky. One of their members is running a course on "How to use the Meade LX200". The Society's barbecue had to be cancelled three times due to inclement weather. Up and coming talks are Conrad Malin-Smith on the 2008 eclipse, Nik Szymanek on stellar photography and Stuart Clarke on Sun Kings

3.14 Southdowns

South Downs had a recent talks entitled "Happy Birthday Sputnik" by John Axtell, Dr. Marco Bruni on "Gravity Waves". Future talks include John Letheren on Mathematical Shapes and Guy Hurst on Star Clusters. Following Sir Patrick Moore's lead the Society sent a petition against cuts in science, but sadly only a bland reply was received. Current membership is 115 and usual attendance is 35.

3.15 Vectis

The Membership is currently at 120 and is static. The Society has a sky quality metre and is monitoring sky quality. A party was held for opening the their observatory. One long standing member, John Smith, was awarded an OBE in recent honours. IYA 2009 plans are pending. Side walk astronomy is planned as well as a Solar System Walk.

3.16 Wadhurst

The Society meets of the 3rd Wednesday of every month and has 32 members. The Society is looking for new members and wants to expand to the wider district. Former members were canvassed but regrettably none rejoined. The July talk was by James Bradley on orbital oddities. A star party was held in August. October talk is on Fanstein theory. November talk is on the life of stars. A visit to Greenwich is planned to see the Airy Transit Circle. A successful opposition was mounted to the flood lighting of a tennis court. The Society deployed a sky quality meter. One finding was that there was a loss of one whole magnitude when comparing Wadhurst Town Centre and the out lying Sparrows Green.

3.17 Wealden

The Society has purchased a Corinado PST for use by members. The Society has also built and set up a Dobsonian

3.18 Wessex

The Society meets on the first Tuesday of each month. Membership stands at 160 members of which 100 regularly attend meetings and trips. Recent speakers have been Martin Taylor on Deep Sky, Robin Gorman and Piers Bizony on NASA at 50. The Society opened an observatory at Swanage which was officially opened twice; first by Lempit Opik MP and the second opening was by John Mason. The mainstay of the Society is a 14" Meade.

3.19 Worthing

Worthing meets on 3rd Monday of every month. Recent talks included "Galaxy Zoo". The Society had an astronomical exhibition at Worthing Central Library for 2 weeks. Worthing Council let the Society use the space for free. The Society has

made an application for a new telescope. The Society has a new website and a new committee.

4. Reports from SAGAS Working Group

4.1. Change of Working Group Personnel

4.1.1. John Axtell reported on behalf of the Working Group that unfortunately there had been difficulties within the WG over the last 6 months. The WG agreed that going into detail was not appropriate to this forum, but suffice to say we had to take the decision to part company with David Woods who had been Newsletter Editor. We had also to pay for a new website, as the original remained within the control of Mr Woods. As yet there was no replacement Newsletter Editor, but the meeting agreed that as there had only been one newsletter since the WG was formed, we should use a combination of website and email to publicise notices etc.

4.1.2. John also reported that Keith has decided to step down as WG Coordinator. This was because of some lengthy planned holidays abroad. Graham Bryant (Hampshire AG) has joined the Working Group and will take on the Coordinator role

4.2. Treasurer's Report

Brian Halls stated that the SAGAS account held £231. He also asked members societies to feedback to him if they had particular ideas as to how the money should be best used.

4.3. Herstmonceux

John Stapleton & John Axtell reported back to the membership about the 2-day Astronomy event at Herstmonceux during September. Several SAGAS member societies (East Sussex, Eastbourne, Lewes, and Wealden) had stands in their own right, all other SAGAS members were represented on the SAGAS stand itself. We carried several societies' literature together with a flyer identifying all member societies and their contacts. Many of these were distributed to interested members of the public. Pictures taken on the two days were shown, including those taken when Sir Patrick Moore visited the SAGAS stand during his tour of the Societies Tent.

4.4. Lib Dem party Conference, Bournemouth

The two Johns also reported on the SAGAS stand mounted at September's party Conference at Bournemouth. This had been at the request of the RAS and IYA2009. Delegates had been particularly interested in the CfDS literature on display. One MP might even join her local SAGAS society!

4.5. Feedback from FAS Council

John Axtell now has an additional role, that of Membership Secretary of the Federation. Keith will still however act as SAGAS Representative to FAS, as he has for many years. John reported back on the July Council meeting. The Council has agreed that Regional Reps travel fees to Council meetings will in future be borne by the FAS. There will be a grant of up to £200 for Regional groups to support IYA activities. The 1st of the new FAS booklets (on general observing) is now ready and will soon be joined by the 2nd (on choosing a telescope).

4.6. Web Stars

John Murrell, the SAGAS webmaster, had visited all the web sites from the SAGAS member societies as part of the SAGAS WebStars project to check if the

links from the SAGAS site worked and that there were visible and working links back to the SAGASonLine web site. This is important as links help to improve the rating of both sites in search engines. While some sites had very good links to SAGAS there was no evidence of a link on a disappointing number of sites. Each Society's result will be emailed to that Society in confidence after the meeting.

5. Draft SAGAS Constitution

John Stapleton circulated a draft SAGAS constitution and requested comments by email. It is planned to incorporate revisions and present the Constitution for approval at the January meeting.

6. IYA2009

John Stapleton said that SAGAS welcomes society reports (by email if possible) on how they propose to support the International Year of Astronomy. A rolling presentation available on a memory stick was proposed which member societies could use. Public preservation were planned. Robin Gorman (Hampshire AG) took us through the planning of IYA. Events will be co-ordinated by RAS. There is planned "See what Galileo saw". National Astronomy week will take place at Syon House on 26th July celebrating Thomas Harriott's first use of a telescope. Other events include Telescope 400 events that support 26th July 2009 at Syon House. Other IYA events included three Moonwatches.

- 1 - a spring Moonwatch from 28th March to 5th April
- 2 - an autumn Moonwatch from 24th to 31st October 2009 and
- 3 - a schools Moonwatch from 19th to 27th November 2009

Solar observations were also planned. The message from SAGAS is that this is a once in a lifetime event and that Societies should make the most of IYA to boost interest in astronomy and to encourage more people to become active in astronomy.

6. 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.

7. Campaign for Dark Skies

Bob Mizon gave an update. The Campaign had sought to recognise those who promoted dark skies. The campaign had been assisted by Mark Morgan-Taylor who advised on planning law. The campaign had succeed in getting sky beams (used as theatrical and musical events) regulated. The Highways Agency had fully adopted down lighting. Bob stressed that the campaign was not against lighting but bad lighting. It was hoped that some Councils would adopt switch off street lights after midnight which would not only save power but would return dark skies.

8. Isle of Wight Star Party 2009

Lucy Rogers stated that after the success of the first Isle of Wight Star Party the

society is holding its second event between Thursday 26th to Monday 30th March 2009. Website www.iowstarparty.org has the details. Discounts with the Wightlink ferry company will again be arranged. Photographs taken at this year's event were displayed in the coffee area at the break.

9. **AOB & Date of Next Meeting**

There was no other business. The next meeting will be held at the Southdowns Planetarium on 17th January 2009.

End of Formal Business

There was a BREAK for refreshments.

The meeting ended with a fascinating talk by Simon Allen from East Sussex Astronomical Society on the Space Elevator. This exciting project was promoted by Arthur C. Clarke and several countries, notably Japan, are actively pursuing research into this area. When built it will reduce the cost of getting payloads (including human payloads) into orbit to a thousandth of what it costs with rockets.