



**Minutes of 16<sup>th</sup> January 2010**  
**South Downs Planetarium Chichester**

**Chairing Society:**  
**Farnham Astronomical Society**

John Price, Chairman of Farnham Astronomical Society, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance.

1. **Introductions and Welcome**

Representatives from 13 societies were in attendance as follows:

<b>SAGAS members</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>
Ashford AS	Butcher	Monika
Ashford AS	Hall	Jason
Ashford AS	Wagar	Drew
Brighton AS	Wade	John
Brighton AS	Moppett	Barry
Cody AS	Alner	Pat
Cody AS	Alner	Phil
Croydon AS	Murrell	John
Eastbourne AS	Brackenborough	Keith
Farnham AS	Campbell-Burns	Peter
Farnham AS	Moore	John
Farnham AS	Price	John
Foredown Tower Astronomers	Inman	David
Guildford AS	Axtell	John
Hampshire AG	Bryant	Graham
Hampshire AG	Gorman	Robin
Hampshire AG	Harris	David
Horsham AG	Richard	Griffith
South Downs AS	Whittington	John
South Downs AS	Whittington	Jan
Wadhurst AS	Berry	Phil
Wadhurst AS	Berry	Nicky

SAGAS members	Last Name	First Name
Worthing Astronomers	Young	Janet
Worthing Astronomers	Halls	Brian

Apologies were received from the following societies:

- Crawley AS
- East Sussex AS
- Wessex AS
- Vectis AS

2. Minutes of the October Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the October meeting were accepted without comments or correction.

3. Society Reports:

As notes of the attending societies had been previously circulated, the society representatives were each asked to give only a précis of their report. This was duly done except by Hampshire AG who had not previously circulated its report.

Wadhurst AS has solicited feedback from its members by asking them to participate in a survey. The society would be pleased to make its questionnaire available to other societies interested in doing something similar. Societies should contact Phil Berry if they would like a copy of the survey.

Hampshire reported on its good links with Portsmouth University; the University has provided some kit for students studying for their BSc and who are undertaking practical astronomy work at the Hampshire AG Observatory. Guildford AS is another society benefiting from its relationship with Surrey University.

One of the common themes of the society feedback was the popularity and success of the many IYA 2009 and other public events. Several societies reported their intent to hold further public events in 2010.

In response to the East Sussex AS society report recommending the use of wikis as a tool for society communications, John Axtell told the meeting that East Sussex AS has been invited to present a showcase report on this subject at the next SAGAS meeting.

Ashford AS presented a showcase report on its objectives and activities. The presentation included a short video created to promote the society and its “Astrobash” event. The showcase presentation is available on the SAGAS web site. The video is available to be viewed on youtube.com (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bScsgB88fp8>).

Peter Campbell-Burns (Farnham AS) reported a strong response from members at the AGM with several volunteers stepping forward to fill vacancies on the committee. Peter felt that Farnham’s success was attributable in part to breaking down the perception that the society was made up of ‘the committee’ and ‘the members’.

Society reports are available on the SAGAS web site.

#### 4. Report back From FAS & Convention

Keith Brackenborough gave a report on the FAS Council held on 5<sup>th</sup> December in London.

Keith provided the meeting with some background to his recent email notification of the discount on FAS subscriptions. At the council FAS reported its concerns about an accumulation of over £44K of funds on its balance sheet and the question that this raises: whether societies are being charged too much. Keith had argued for a reduction in the subscription levels but the levels of subscription for 2010 have already been agreed. Instead of a cut, societies are being offered a 50% reduction in their 2010 subscriptions if these are paid promptly.

Keith also raised a concern that what societies paid for public liability insurance did not reflect the cost of the policy. As a result, a similar discount has been agreed and will be applied to societies who make prompt payment. Full details of these discounts are expected to be circulated by FAS in the next couple of weeks.

FAS would like to hold more of its events in other regional areas; its conventions have been held in Cambridge and Birmingham. A joint SAGAS / FAS meeting in the South has been suggested but its timing would need to fit around other meetings and conventions in the astronomy calendar.

SAGAS is now the largest area group – unlike SAGAS, the other area groups are struggling to convene area meetings.

Phil Alner (Cody AS) asked about the existence of a feedback mechanism for reporting how many there are in a society; John Axtell confirmed that there is a mechanism for reporting membership and Societies report this every year. This relies on a certain degree of trust as an audit process would be too onerous, but experience suggests that societies are being honest. Phil suggested that misreporting of membership might lead to an insurance risk.

Keith told the meeting that he was against set fees based on membership numbers and would like FAS to change its fees structure, but the FAS chairman was adamant that it should remain.

Graham Bryant (Hampshire AG) asked what questions should be put to FAS about the accumulation of the fund: What it is there for? What plans are in place to reduce it? Keith responded that FAS realises it is too high and has no plans to increase it. David Inman (Foredown Tower) commented that IYA was supposed to have provided financial support to societies but FAS made it difficult to get hold of this; this was not the case for Universities and Colleges where IYA 2009 funds were available more readily – was this part of the £44K? Keith suggested that this was not the case as IYA 2009 money did not come from FAS. However, FAS did have a scheme to encourage area groups.

John Murrell (Croydon AS) asked whether the insurance excess was payable by FAS or a society making a claim. Keith thought it was FAS who would pay but as this was an important consideration for societies he agreed to check and report back. It was noted that there had been no successful claims to date.

**Action: Keith Brackenborough**

John Axtell reminded the attendees that it was important that Societies kept him informed of changes in the committee. From now on SAGAS will only hold details of the Secretary and Treasurer – any societies who do not have these roles should nominate suitable points of contact so that he has a named recipient for SAGAS communications to societies.

#### 5. Isle of Wight Star Party

The Isle of Wight Star party will take place on 11th-15th March 2010. The event was recommended to by John Axtell who pointed out that the location offered good dark skies.

There was no one from Vectis present at the meeting to talk about the IoW Star Party. However, attendees were informed that details would be made available soon. There is an Isle of Wight Star Party web site which attendees could communicate to their respective society members. The website URL is: (<http://www.iowstarparty.org>)

Bookings are being handled by the Brighstone Holiday camp and not Vectis; Brighstone is not yet ready to take bookings. At last year's event the Wightlink ferry operators offered a discount – it has yet to be confirmed whether a similar discount will be offered this year.

#### 6. SAGAS Summer Meeting

John Axtell introduced the SAGAS Summer Meeting to be held on 10th July 2010 at Surrey Satellites Technology Limited (SSTL), Guildford.

Dr Stuart Eves will be the official host and it is hoped that there will be tours of the clean rooms where satellites are constructed. It has yet to be confirmed but John suggested that there may need to be a cap on numbers (maybe 100) and suggested that there might be a need to book early. As usual there will be a discount for SAGAS members.

Speakers at the event will include Dr Stuart Eves, a LOFAR speaker, a GAS speaker and an MSSl speaker. Trade stands will include Aurora books, Astronomia and Ian King. John Murrell suggested that an approach is made to the Widescreen Centre.

## 7. Herstmonceux 2010

John Axtell discussed SAGAS / Society attendance at the Herstmonceux 2010. Concern was again raised over the location of the societies tent which lead to very poor attendance last year. Herstmonceux has been approach but as yet have not responded.

As before local societies can have their own tables / displays but SAGAS will represent those societies unable to attend. Societies should just need to provide their prospectus / fliers so that these can be made available on the SAGAS table.

The idea of a 'telescope clinic' has been mooted (by John Stapleton) and John asked whether attendees thought this a good idea. John also asked for volunteers to run this.

Peter Campbell-Burns (Farnham AS) suggested that the treasure hunt style quiz that Farnham used at its IYA 2009 event might attract visitors to the society area. Entrants must register and collect question sheets from the society area and must return their question sheets to this area. The quiz is also self publicising to a degree as there will need to be fact sheets located across the campus. Peter took an action to obtain the quiz material from its author (Barry Bellinger).

**Action: Peter Campbell-Burns**

Phil Alner (Cody AS) asked whether this would have the support of Herstmonceux which it would need if it was to be successful. John confirmed that Herstmonceux had undertaken to support this.

John Murrell (Crawley AS) asked whether the Science Centre 'black hole' model could be obtained. John agreed to look into this.

**Action: John Axtell**

John Axtell stressed the importance of improving the impression we make at events such as Herstmonceux and asked for ideas. He also asked for any material showing what the member societies have been doing so that the impression we give is truly SAGAS.

Phil Alner (Cody AS) stressed the need to control what goes on stands; previously SAGAS has been blocked out due to there being more 'gear' than space.

#### 8. Any Other Business

Brian Hall discussed the matter of £300 left in the kitty after SAGAS running costs and hire of the venue had been taken into account. Brian asked for ideas from members on how this could be spent – is there anything we could use as a group such as a large screen for outreach activities.

Brian also discussed a proposal for an Astronomy Day, the issue being that there is nothing to follow IYA 2009 and therefore the IYA 2009 legacy could be lost. FAS had declined a suggestion that they could run with this suggesting that it was really down to IYA 2009 organisers. Brian asked the meeting whether societies would be interested in supporting an astronomy day.

#### 9. Dates of next Meeting

10<sup>th</sup> April      Chaired by Foredown Tower Astronomers  
10<sup>th</sup> July        Summer event hosted by Guildford AS  
16<sup>th</sup> October    Vectis AS

The formal section of the meeting was closed at 16.20hrs

Following refreshments, John Moore and Donal McDonnell gave a presentation in the Planetarium dome entitled '*Imaging in Tenerife, 2008*'.

(note: new images from John and Donal's 2009 imaging expedition to Tenerife can be found on <http://www.astroimaging.org.uk>. This site is well worth visiting.)

Meeting Closed at 17.30hrs.

Thanks offered to the South Downs Planetarium volunteers for their assistance and hospitality.

On behalf of the SAGAS Committee, John Axtell thanked Farnham AS for their work in administering this meeting.

Minutes:

Peter Campbell-Burns  
16<sup>th</sup> January 2010