

## **SOCIETY REPORTS**

Submitted by Member Societies for the SAGAS Meeting on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2009

No reports have been received from the following societies by the time this document needed to be circulated:

*Brighton & Hove, Newbury, Orpington, Richmond & Kew, Southdowns, Wealden*

If these reports can be eventually submitted then they will be added to the version available on the SAGAS website.

### **Ashford Astronomical Society**

The Ashford Astronomical Society has been extremely busy with our IYA2009 responsibilities. We have been giving visual and practical presentations to local primary schools, beavers and cubs, scouts and guides troops in our catchment area. Well over 200 children have seen our shows not including parents, teachers and leaders. The Woodchurch brownies and Great Chart cubs have been awarded their Stargazing and Astronomer badges respectively as a result of the efforts of our members. Two of us were actually awarded honorary Astronomer badges in recognition. We were absolutely chuffed to bits with this as you can imagine. We are about to embark on a more serious series of talks aimed at GCSE and A level students at one of our local Grammar schools. We have various pitches booked for later this year at some of the more auspicious local fayres and fetes spreading the word even further. We aim to have alongside our usual exhibits, a Solar telescope hooked up to a CCD camera and a monitor so that weather permitting, we can do some daylight astronomy. In addition to our usual programme of meetings throughout the year, we are planning a whole day astronomical event and exhibition where all are welcome at our own event. This is scheduled for 24th October this year. We are hoping to collaborate on this with some of our neighbouring societies.

Our paid up membership has grown to nearly 37, with lots of extra guests attending the meetings each month. We have been extremely lucky so far with the weather because at our new venue we have been able to get the telescopes out and do some real stargazing almost every meeting. This just was not possible at our last venue. We are very up-beat about the immediate future at AAS.

### **Basingstoke Astronomical Society**

Since January Basingstoke have enjoyed several successful meetings and a full week of IYA Moonwatch activities.

A public "sidewalk" event was held at the Chineham Shopping Centre where an empty unit was given over to our use. Several hundred people attended and looked through telescopes throughout the week.

Another event was held at Cliddesden School which catered to families and friends of children at the school and attendance was also good at this event.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April Paul Money will be talking to us about the Messier Marathon. You are welcome to attend.

## **Cody Astronomical Society**

Membership now at 47

Observing - not a lot done due to the cloud we have been experiencing.

Lectures - In February Dr Will Percival who is a senior research scientist working on observational and theoretical cosmology at the University of Portsmouth, gave us a talk on Light from the Big Bang. A very interesting talk and one that we can recommend. He has the ability to put things over to all levels of understanding.

Outreach - In January Gordon Lloyd and Phil Alner assisted with the INTECH telescope amnesty ( see report by Gordon Lloyd in SAGAS news letter ).

We have been active with two scout groups and one cub pack, helping with their Astronomy badges. Also with 2 schools.

## **Crawley Astronomical Society**

Our speakers since the last SAGAS meeting have been as follows:

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February Mr John Axtell - Subject "Happy Birthday Sputnik"  
Friday March 21<sup>st</sup> Mr Nik Szymanek - Subject "The Faulkes Telescopes"  
Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April - Members evening " Sky Scout and other ways to navigate the Sky".

Crawley had planned to join Guildford AS on their first IYA Public outreach evening at Newlands Corner. The weather in the days preceding the event had been very cold with some ice and snow lying . It was decided 24hours before the event it would be unwise for most of our members to make the road journey however one member who lives close by in Dorking made the event . She took along her husband and two children and enjoyed the meeting very much. Weather permitting we hope to join up with Guildford A.S. for their nex IYA observing evenings on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May.

Our own IYA plans are to hold an exhibition in the new Crawley library later in the year.

As we had Nik Szymanek speaking to us in February I attempted to interest member of the Crawley Camera Club in attending the meeting. I engaged in a series of E-mails with their Meetings secretary in the hope that he could raise interest in the talk by Nik. In the event only one member of the Camera Club joined us but all was not in vain as I understand that Nik has agreed to talk to Crawley Camera Club next Spring (2010) he and will base his talk on Photography of the Sky rather than the Astronomy behind his images.

## **Croydon Astronomical Society**

No change to the main committee positions, which meets every 2 months. We are due to have an AGM on 8 May; where the Chairman and Treasurer are due to step down from their positions.

Currently membership stands around 80 signed up members, with an additional 3 life members.

We have been involved in a couple of outreach projects, during March. The first was at Purley Library; where we had a display of pictures taken by members, for around a month. There also a series of lectures at the library on 20 March.

The other project was at a local scout campsite near to Croydon, called Frylands. This a Croydon Scout District project, involving 50 Scout Groups, who were completing their science and astronomy badges. This event took place on Saturday 7 March.

We were blessed with a reasonable clear night on Saturday, 4 April, for our Moonwatch. Quite a few members of the public turned up. Using our new observatory digital projector, we played a DVD on the Moon.

The society is due to go on a visit to Otford, for a walk around the planets. Also we will be holding IYA events at Croydon and Purley Libraries during October, plus a further Moon and Jupiter watch, in the same month.

Our new, newsletters called Altair, has gone down well with members; with a lot of good feedback. I am glad to say that we now have a permanent editor.

Some upcoming lectures are:

Tony Sizer: Beyond our Galaxy – 24 April

Konrad Malin-Smith: Redshift galaxies and the early universe – 22 May February

## **East Sussex Astronomical Society**

The Society has engaged in some Outreach activities with local Scout groups and schools.

Solar observing has taken place at the De La Warr and after some persistence on behalf of some dedicated members the Sun was eventually found. One member did suggest using setting circles to see if the Sun could be located.

The Society had a greater success with the Moonwatch which ran from 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. There was one clouded out evening but the others were clear and the last one on 31<sup>st</sup> was the best of all. Over that period we estimate some 60 people looked through members telescopes and perhaps not realising it replicated the experience of Galileo and Thomas Harriott 400 years ago.

Internally the Society has been reviewing its constitution and procedures. We have found that we needed to tweak our constitution and that our bank account did not allow standing orders to be set up for us as income and did not allow us to set ones up to pay recurrent expenses and so we have moved our account to the HSBC which allows us much more freedom and yet still fulfils our requirements of cheques being signed by two members.

We have had a succession of good monthly lectures.

In February we tried for the first time a hands on experiment with a selection of lenses. We started off with a talk on the mathematics of optics, demonstrating focal ratios and magnification and then with a selection of lenses, a piece of baton and bits of plasticine we made our own Galilean telescopes checking their focal lengths and calculating the magnification of our instruments.

In March we invited Lisette Petrie who gave a talk on Exoplanets. This is a very new science that did not exist 15 years ago and it is amazing how far it has gone. Lisette is a very talented speaker and we hope that other Societies might issue her an invitation. Lisette's talk was very topical with the successful launch of Kepler the next day!

March is also our annual General knowledge Quiz open to all. It give us so much needed revenue and is great fun. For some years a team known as the Specys (due to them all being spectacle wearers) again beat the competition but not by that much and so we look forward to a re-match next year and the opportunity to thrash them.

We ended March with our Moonwatch reported on above.

April saw a departure from our usual style of lecture when one of our own members Peter Bolwell gave an informative and compelling talk on the how astronomy has been portrayed in science fiction. Many of the great writers of that past and some of the present were amazingly prescient in their predications and which have become science fact.

In May we have invited Dr Roger Wood "Telescopes: Ancient and Modern". Roger is also a members of our Society. We will follow this by a live demonstration of GalazyZoo 2 where the armchair astronomer can really contribute. We will also have "A Beginners Guide to Galaxies" by Chris Woodcock, an ESAS member, who will describe the shapes, sizes and evolution of galaxies.

In July we have invited Konrad Malin-Smith "Desert Eclipses" ~ Konrad will tell of his successful solar eclipse observing in the Sahara and Gobi Deserts.

We do not have a meeting in August but we will hold our Annual Barbecue.

We are still need to do more to celebrate IYA 2009 and would be interested in any ideas that other Societies have. Perhaps we could join with a neighbouring Societies to promote this.

## **Eastbourne Astronomical Society**

The Redoubt Fort was built on Eastbourne seafront about 1805 as a defence against an attack by Napoleon. It is now a military museum owned by Eastbourne Council. In view of falling attendance the council has appointed a new Publicity manager and already it is a focal point for the new Eastbourne Arts and Culture Festival.

The society has now been approached asking if we could stage some astronomical events at the centre linked with IYA 2009, Astro navigation and navigation at sea. They also want us to stage some observing from the site. In many ways it is far from perfect as an observing venue but several members of the committee visited the site and it was agreed that this could give good local publicity. One of our members, Gordon Taylor, retired from the Nautical Almanac Office at Herstmonceux many years ago agreed to help.

As with many societies we were active in the IYA 2009 'Spring Moon watch' event. We had telescopes on 'The Western Lawns'. This is the main exhibition area on the seafront on which major exhibitions are held during the tourist season. There are a number of requirements placed by the council of using this

site – public liability insurance, first aid facilities and a fire extinguisher! There is rather too much light pollution on site too.

Telescopes were on site on March 28<sup>th</sup>, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. This would be followed by our normal meeting on April 4<sup>th</sup>. There were seven telescopes and many sets of binoculars available and, apart from two of the dates, March 28<sup>th</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup> the weather was good.

The main problem was that we were badly let down by the publicity. Local radio said they would do a piece about the event: they didn't. In the past, such as bright comets, they have interviewed members. Members delivered posters to libraries. Not all libraries actually display them or took them down before the event. The local newspaper expressed interest, but didn't put anything in. They have done so in the past for eclipses of the Moon and we have had up to 100 people come along on a cloudy night to see it! However, we did have some 30 people the first night and several did attend our next meeting.

Membership is just over 100 and attendance at meetings remains at 50 – 60 a meeting. The last talk was on 'Supermassive Black Holes in Clusters of Galaxies' by Robert Dunn of University of Munich.

The Observing evenings held nine miles from the town at Arlington are increasing in popularity and a short basic talk now takes place if the weather is poor, so members are still encouraged to attend regardless of observing conditions.

The society library is also increasing in use. Some 10 books are borrowed at each meeting. The society has 170 titles available and is increasing its Video and DVD collection.

## **Farnham Astronomical Society**

### Membership

The 2009 subscription year has seen a few members deciding not to renew. Some subscriptions are still outstanding but membership is estimated to be around 42 members.

### Publicity

We have had much success promoting the society in the local press, with coverage in newspapers in both Fleet and Farnham catchment areas as well an interview with Delta Radio. We hope this will result in an increase in membership. The Society also made available funds for the production of colour A5 flyers to be distributed in libraries, shops and other public spaces.

### IYA 2009

The Society held a very successful public event at Gostrey Meadow Park in Farnham to coincide with the Spring Moonwatch. We were able to set out ten telescopes of different types and sizes (up to an 11" SCT) for solar and daytime lunar observing, as well as display boards presenting information about the Society and its activities. Material promoting SAGAS and its member societies was also displayed in a prominent position.

On this occasion the weather was exceptionally kind to us with clear blue skies from the moment we set up. This was despite a forecast of wind and showers for

much of the day and was a far cry from the heavy rain forecast just a day or two beforehand. The weather was almost certainly a factor in us seeing an overwhelming level of interest from the public.

Barry Bellinger set up an excellent and educational treasure-hunt style competition in which over forty children took part. Children completing the competition were given an IYA 2009 button badge designed by Barry Bellinger (these were sourced on the Internet and cost just £50 for 250 badges). A prize draw will be held at our next meeting to decide the eventual winner.

We have no idea how many adults looked at our exhibits and telescopes, but they must number in the low 100s – from early afternoon there was continually a small crowd around the telescopes. One visitor came all the way from Richmond especially to see us. Another welcome visitor was James Clarke – an ex Farnham member who is working towards a PhD in astrophysics.

Whilst looking after the display boards which were sheltered in a gazebo-style tent, I was constantly impressed by how well informed many of our visitors were on astronomical topics as well as by the depth and complexity of their questions.

We signed up two new members on the spot but if every visitor who said they would attend our next meeting actually do turn up we will need a MUCH bigger hall. Barry Bellinger intends to write-up the event and submit an article to Astronomy Now.

#### Other Society Activities

Steve Woodbridge organised a second workshop on variable star and lunar observing to coincide with the February meeting. Steve opened the meeting with an introductory presentation and provided participants with variable star charts. Despite some cloud we able to do some observing and the event was a great success.

External speakers at recent meetings were as follows:

- ♦ January meeting: Introduction to SAGAS (J.Axtell, G.Bryant)
- ♦ March meeting: Shields for the Starship Enterprise (Dr Ruth Bamford)

#### Programme for 2009

Our speaker programme for the remainder of 2009 is as follows:

Date	Subject	Speaker/Visit
14 April 09	Imaging in Tenerife	John Moore, Donal McDonnell
12 May 09	Our Vital Moon	Dr Robin Gorman
9 June 09	Exploring Mars & Other Planets	Dr Helen Walker
14 July 09	Remote Control of Your Telescope	Dr Lillian Hobbs
11 Aug 09	To be confirmed	
08 Sept 09	The English Mount	Peter Hingley (RAS)
13 Oct 09	The Latest from 'Galaxy Zoo'	Dr Chris Lintott
10 Nov 09	A History of Deep Sky Observing	Alan Dowdell
8 Dec 09	AGM, Member's Talks and Christmas Buffet	

## **Foredown Tower Astronomers**

On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 a meeting was held in the room at the top of Foredown Tower. The meeting began outside with the telescopes, as the evening was reasonably clear and we were able to observe the crescent of Venus. There was a short talk on the crescent Venus by Mike Feist. Then a talk by George Hurrion about the public events to be staged on 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Followed by David Inman who spoke about the 1 hour long DVD bought from the Eastbourne Astronomy club to celebrate IYA. This will be shown at next meeting. Finally David Inman gave his Apollo 17, 1971 slide show that he was giving at our public event. The meeting ended with refreshments served on the ground floor.

### Public Event 28 – 29 March 2009.

FTA presented MoonWatch, Spring to the public visiting the Tower. It had been published in the local press as per IYA 2009 agenda. Much helpful info was provided by the astronomical magazines published that month.

On 28 March, Celia Barlow MP for Brighton & Hove made a speech to start our season of events.

Then David Inman gave the Apollo 17, slide talk to a packed room, including Councillors & local MP.

One of our members Barry is a skilled carpenter & he has constructed a full size Dalek that gave the public much entertainment.

Later in the evening, members of the FTA, set up scopes to show the public the Moon. The weather was unkind & little was seen.

On 29 March, Mike Feist gave a public talk about the Moon, which he has studied for many years, keeping the level understandable for the man in the street.

## **Guildford Astronomical Society**

Paid-up membership is now 106.

We have continued our normal run of outreach work, and have held observing and talk sessions with Beavers, Cubs, Brownies and Explorer Scouts. Our sessions for the Science Club at Royal Grammar School, Guildford were either clouded out or snowed out! Our next scouting event will be the tri-district camp on 15<sup>th</sup> May with 1000 scouts. For this number of scouts we will be joined by Farnham AS.

Since the last SAGAS Meeting we have held three significant IYA2009 events.

1. 13 February – The first of our series of five “A Tour of The Night Sky” events to be held at Newlands Corner; a local beauty spot, high elevation with a good southern aspect and a car park. This was advertised in the local press on BBC Southern Counties Radio and via an extensive poster campaign utilising the attractive poster templates downloaded from the FAS website. We were able to use the Surrey Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre for an indoor display, which featured many of the items from the SAGAS Rolling Road

Show. We also had several laptops running showing various presentations and DVDs. We had a beautiful clear sky, 16 telescopes, 24 GAS members and between 150 and 200 of the public plus two reporter/photographers and a patrolling police car! It received a very good write-up in *The Surrey Advertiser*. We will repeat twice in May (1<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>) when the Moon will be well positioned. Next time we will also be making tea and coffee for our visitors. Crawley AS plan to join us with telescopes on the 1<sup>st</sup>.

2. 17<sup>th</sup> March, a Tuesday afternoon. We held a session entitled "She Is An Astronomer, She Is a Rocket Scientist" at the University of Surrey. This was aimed at fifth and sixth formers across Surrey and beyond, and featured three female professional astronomers/researchers
  - a. Dr Emily Baldwin, a science writer with Astronomy Now
  - b. Dr Lucie Green, a solar researcher from MSSL
  - c. Dr Mini Saaj, a spacecraft designer from Surrey Space Centre.

The intent was to encourage younger attendees to take science A-levels, and to give older delegates an idea of studying astronomy, astrophysics etc at University and how it can lead to an interesting career. There is a report on the event on the Astronomy Now Website

3. The UK Space Conference 09 was held at Charterhouse School, Godalming from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> April
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> April "Kids Day" -. The very first day was aimed at schoolchildren from years 5 & 6 primary and also secondary school age. GAS was one of the six stations that the groups moved around in a scheduled programme of activities/workshops. We had two H-alpha Solar telescopes, one of which was connected to a MkIII Stellacam plus monitor. We had good weather and though there were no sunspots there were two good prominences. We also had two further white-light 'scopes, one of which was also used for the daylight Moon. There was also an indoor display including an excellent looping presentation on the Sun, courtesy of MSSL.
  - b. 4<sup>th</sup> April – One of the parallel themes was Astronomy, and GAS had helped with identifying female Astronomers, once more following IYA's She's An Astronomer concept (Prof Gillian Wright, Dr Helen Walker, Dr Claire Bretherton, Dr Patricia Schady, Dr Lucy Rogers). Sadly this was poorly attended. It is believed that despite our advertising at AstroFest and around SAGAS, no other members from SAGAS societies actually attended. Was this because of the £40 delegate rate? Feedback would be appreciated at the meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

In May we will have a stand at the Surrey County Show which attracts 40,000 visitors on the late May Bank Holiday. We will have the SAGAS Rolling Road Show plus H-alpha and white light Solar Telescopes. In June some of our members will be at all-day event on The Telescope at The Institute of Physics, London. We will be showing our outreach work using display panels, and our President will be speaking on the use of small refractors for CCD imaging.

Our planned February meeting was disrupted by snow and the speaker could not attend. Fortunately at only a few hours' notice Graham Bryant was kindly able to fill in with his talk "Roving Planetary Vehicles" which had been scheduled for March. March's slot was then filled by Robin Gorman with "Why Pluto Had To Go", which had been scheduled for May. May's slot will now be filled by the

February speaker, Derrick Farley, with "Astrophotography with a Digital SLR" – so everything balances in the end! In April we had Prof Barrie Jones with "Exoplanets and Life Beyond The Solar System"

CCD Training continues apace at our observatory.

Our Projects Group is currently planning a Society-wide series of imaging observations of epsilon Aurigae, the subject of a special project of the IYA. This is an eclipsing binary with the eclipse starting in August and lasting for 2 years with the next in 27 years. The primary is at Mag 3 and dims to about 3.8. Society members with CCD or DSLR cameras are being asked to take short exposure (5-10 sec) RAW images. The Project team will correlate the information and analyse the measurements.

## **Hampshire Astronomical Group**

The Hampshire Astronomical Group has recently opened its observatory to the public during the Spring Moon Watch Week as part of the IYA2009 celebrations. Several 100 people were blessed with reasonably clear skies. Although there was modest coverage in the local newspapers, we were particularly concerned that one newspaper, *The News*, that covers Portsmouth and the greater conurbation did not cover the event at all.

The Group has continued to receive many visits to the observatory as part of its outreach programme. Typically there have been 1-2 visits per week through the autumn/winter and early spring observing season. We are currently looking at the format to maximise the utilisation of the observatory during such visits.

CCTV coverage of the site should be completed during the middle of this year. The images from this system can be viewed remotely from a number of member's homes. This part of the security is to ensure the safety of members who may need to visit the observatory site when the alarms are triggered. We have adopted strict rules for the viewing of images in line with the Information Commissioner's guidelines.

A weather station is being planned at the observatory in order to help plan observing and ascertain the wind gust more accurately when using the domes. The data may or may not be fed to our web site for members to view prior to making the trip to the observatory.

Sky measurements are being made on a regular basis at the observatory to determine sky brightness. This is a long term project to monitor the effect of the new PFI scheme that Hampshire, Southampton and West Sussex have adopted to re-light the area during the next 25 years, on the night sky. It appears that the sky to the south is less light polluted – Portsmouth are already several years into their PFI scheme to improve the Highways which includes relighting the City.

The Group would like to collaborate with other local societies in monitoring the effect of this new scheme.

Along with other astronomical societies during this past year, the Group has taken part in a number of events at the INTECH planetarium. Further events are planned for later in October. We are sure we will see fellow SAGAS member societies when we are there.

## **Horsham Astronomical Group**

In January we held our AGM followed by a very interesting exercise given by our Chairman, Alan Smith – GCSE Astronomy Workshop. This involved going through

a selection of questions from the exam paper in small groups. A very good exercise for anyone thinking about sitting the exam.

Our speaker in February was to have been John Murrell talking about 'Pulsars' but unfortunately with the coldest winter for 20yrs accompanied by deep Snow this had to be cancelled and is now planned for later in the year.

One of our members, Phil Daly, gave a very interesting presentation on Variable Stars for the March meeting.

For our April meeting Brian Sprawson, our Observing Director, had arranged earlier in the year a Lunar Challenger when members choose named Lunar craters out of a hat, each member then put together and gave a short presentation about 'their crater'. This covered anything from a short history about the person the crater is named after to its formation.

Membership continues to grow with new members joining since January.

For the Spring Moon Watch week the group put together a small Lunar exhibition in Horsham Library which showcased members work as well as some information about the Moon. A handout about Horsham Astronomy Group along with membership forms was also left on the display.

## **Lewes Astronomical Society**

We had a table at the Herstmonceux Festival in September and recruited some new members, but we remain a small society with 15-20 regular members. We have had some interesting talks this year, including Orbital Oddities and Galaxy Surveys, and we also had two talks from our own members, one on the history of astronomy, and one very practical, inspiring talk on getting started on astrophotography. We have had some observing sessions when the weather allowed, but not as many as we had hoped.

## **Solent Amateur Astronomers**

We have been busy with IYA events just recently holding public viewing sessions at our Toothill Observatory and individual members giving talks to groups - the Scouts, Beavers, Brownies.

Further public viewing sessions are planned this month and in the months to come.

## **Vectis Astronomical Society**

Weekly meetings at the observatory are continually well attended by at least 20 people each week. Our monthly meetings are also well supported with at least 50 people attending each one. We currently have 123 members and have sent out a survey to discover what the membership wants from the society etc.

Our speakers this year have included David Whitehouse (BBC Science Correspondent), Prof. Malcolm Coe (Southampton University) and Prof. Ian Morison (Jodrell Bank Observatory). All three were well received

and we would ask them to talk to our society again.

IYA outreach events have included taking telescopes to a public house and to Brading Roman Villa, and a night of Starry Tales, combined with the Island Storytellers. We have also been to two island schools. So far, we have reached over 150 people. Other IYA events planned include taking telescopes to a WI group and various sidewalk astronomy events.

The Isle of Wight Star Party went very well, and was reported on BBC TV and radio. The report is in the SAGAS newsletter.

One of our members, Brian Curd, has set up <http://www.sqmreadings.com/forum> to discuss ways of combining Sky Quality Meter (SQM) readings with a map. Please join the forum if you have any ideas or readings he can use.

## **Wadhurst Astronomical Society**

### **Membership**

Paid membership is now 31. A decrease of one member since last year.

#### Actions taken to address membership issue:

1. We have increased the number of entries in the local press and also online in the East Sussex Courier Newspaper.
2. We have altered the wording in our press announcements to include Wadhurst and District and also the phrase "Your local Astronomical Society".
3. When possible we make press announcements more enticing with a few words about the speaker.
4. We have also started writing small astronomical articles for the local press which have been very well received.
5. We have placed more eye-catching advertisements in the local village notice board and are now also advertising in Lamberhurst.
6. We have a 6 month trial of charging a £2 on the door non-members fee. This has attracted an average of 4 non-members to each meeting since beginning of 6 month trial in February 2009. We believe this also attracts people who may not necessarily want to become full members.
7. We have now altered the programme for our evenings. They now comprise the main –speaker followed by a free tea/coffee & biscuit break. This is then followed by two mini-talks. One is on astronomical equipment and the other is "This Month's Night Sky". Several members have remarked on how much they enjoy the new format.

#### Treasurer

We now have £452.18 in the current account and £1169.77 in the reserve account.

### Speakers & Events

In order to try and increase membership involvement, the society committee have agreed a scheme to offer a year's free membership for a talk for a limited number of meetings. This is available to members who commit to give a minimum 45 minute talk to the society and has been very successful with a very well received talk on the "Earth and the Environment from an Astronomical Perspective" by a member in February. We also have another member booked to give a talk in July and another in December.

This is turning out to be a "Win-Win" for both the society and the members as both parties benefit.

January This was our AGM and was followed by a talk by Phil Berry named "The Further Trials and Tribulations of an Amateur Astronomer", a follow on talk from last year, now that he has completed his observatory.

February This was a talk given under our "Free Membership for a Talk Scheme". The talk was by Dr. Jan Drozd who spoke on "The Earth and its Environment from an Astronomical Perspective". A very good talk which raised a lot of questions from the audience.

March A talk by Rob Cray a founding member who presented on the "Apollo Missions 1 to 12". Part 1 of a fascinating and eye-opening talk.

March On the 21st March we had a group visit to the ROG with Jonathan Betts the Senior Horologist at the ROG to have a tour of the Harrison Clocks and the back rooms of Flamsteed House. 20 members turned up and had a very memorable day. Jonathan was brilliant. In the afternoon another tour of the NMM was set up with a museum guide.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> We had a local Spring Moonwatch at Phil Berry's observatory for Sparrows Green local residents and members of our Society. Friday was cloudy but several came along anyway as we had a media show and a stall complete with rolling presentation and Orrery. It was very well received and was enjoyed by all who attended. Saturday was clear and we enjoyed the Moon as well as views of Saturn.

April Dr. Stuart Clark is giving a talk based on his book "The Sun Kings".

May John Axtell is to give a talk on "Sputnik in Context".

June A Telescope Evening including a talk and demonstration by John Vale-Taylor on "Telescope Optics".

July A member Dr Bob Seany talks on "Astro- Archaeology in the British Isles" Based on his recent research.

August – No meeting- Star Party kindly given each year by one of our committee who has a small holding.

September Rob Cray returns with Part 2 of his talk. "Apollo Missions 13 to 17".

Our Sub Group "The Angus Club". (Practical Home Astronomy Group)

Member Brian Mills will hold a meeting at his home on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

FLOODLIGHTING of Wadhurst Tennis Courts in the Hamlet of Sparrows Green  
Local Residents have taken legal action to protect the environment of this AONB against unnecessary floodlighting of private tennis courts with a Judicial Review against the Wealden District Council. The WDC have now consented to withdraw planning permission and we now are waiting for the Private Tennis Club to sign the consent form. To date they have refused, the High Court is now aware of their delaying tactics and if they persist we will be going to trial.

## **Wessex Astronomical Society**

Last year the Society built an observatory at Durlston Country Park near Swanage. An advantage of the location is the existence of the park's visitor facilities including a visitor centre close to the observatory which we can use for

talks associated with public events and for the visits by organised groups. The observatory consists of a 14" Meade LX200 telescope housed under a Pulsar 2.6 metre dome. The associated equipment includes high performance CCD camera.

So far this year, as part of our IYA 2009 activities, the Society has hosted three public events, two school visits, and several visits by private groups. At the public events and school visits an illustrated talk is given by one of our members followed by observations with the observatory telescope as well as smaller telescopes set up by members. All these events except one had good skies for observation and visitors went away very pleased with their experience. Even the event when observation wasn't possible ended with the visitors very happy with the extended illustrated talk they were given.

Besides the public and organised events the observatory gets used by a number of our members for both visual observation and imaging with the CCD camera. A gallery of the images made is being built up on the Society's website.

There have been about 250 non-WAS visitors to the observatory so far this year.

Talks are on the second Tuesday of the month. This year we have had:  
'Sixty Years an Amateur Astronomer' by Geoff Kirby, a local member.  
'Colliding Galaxies' by Sheri Barrington from Weymouth.  
'The Early Universe' by Konrad Malin-Smith, who I'm sure is well-known to many SAGAS member

Membership stands at about 140, but many regular attendees aren't members. Annual Subscription is £15, and we charge £2 for non-members to attend talks. For many this means it's less expensive to pay on an ad hoc basis, and attendance at talks is typically 100 – 110.

## **Worthing Astronomers**

The group have had two successful observer's nights – one at the end of January and one at the end of February.

Several members took advantage of these and turned out to look at numerous objects, including the Moon, Venus, Saturn and a number of deep sky objects. One new member bought his telescope that he had not been able to use very well – those present were able to point him in the right direction and the members went away pleased that his investment was now giving him some returns.

Two WA members spent an enjoyable early evening with a Brownie pack, showing them the Moon, Venus and the ISS as part of their 'stargazers' badge.

The recent Moon Watch Week went off extremely well. The WA had arranged with the local borough council to use a part of the Worthing promenade known as Splash Point for the observing. Seven of the nine nights were clear.

Of course, the site is very well lit by ornamental lighting, however this was not to off putting – the Moon and Saturn were sufficiently bright and the views to the south were unencumbered by buildings and lights as we looked out to a flat horizon. M42 was a popular deep sky object for people to look at.

Over two hundred people came and saw the views through the various telescopes that members had bought with them. Some members of the public were so

impressed they bought their own instruments with them, dusted down from their storage in garages and attics.

The group advertised themselves with flyers given out to those who attended – mentioning the IYA and a small piece about the WA. Local advertising was by means of posters around the town and a mention on the local radio station. The people of Worthing now know a little bit more about astronomy and the WA have taken up some new members.

Those WA members who bought along their `scopes certainly enjoyed the `side-walk' astronomy concept and it is likely this will become part of the WA programme of bringing astronomy to the people of Worthing.

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John Axtell  
SAGAS Secretary  
15<sup>th</sup> April 2009