

SOCIETY REPORTS

Submitted by Member Societies for the SAGAS Meeting on Saturday 17th January 2009

Ashford Astronomical Society

2008 was a very exciting time for our relatively young society with membership now up to 28 fully paid-up members.

As of 1st January 2009 we will be moving to a new meeting address at the Woodchurch Memorial Halls, Woodchurch, Ashford, TN26 3QB. Our previous meeting place suffered considerable light pollution, which made any viewing almost impossible. Woodchurch has some of the darkest skies in the South East, a total contrast. The result is that as of now, any of our meetings is a potential stargazing, and / or imaging opportunity after the general proceedings are over. Our message to our members is therefore; if it is clear, bring your telescope.

Our meeting dates have moved to the last Friday every month, so people aren't so pressurised to get home afterwards as was the case on our Monday meetings as we had before.

We have had considerable support from our local media, with KMFM Ashford radio station in particular reading out very professionally almost every day our advert for the society and it's meetings on air for free. We have had a great deal of interest through this channel as you can imagine.

We have got an exciting programme of speakers at least up to August 2009 and we are planning an Astronomy all day event in October (tbc) which will engage young and old alike with if all goes to plan, rocketry demonstrations, a mobile planetarium, speakers and exhibits plus much more. We will be contacting our neighbouring societies in Kent in due course to invite them to take part in any way they can.

We also hope to get into local schools and do talks and demonstrations, as is our duty to IYA2009.

The society has acquired it's first club telescope a Meade ETX90 PE. This has 3 eyepieces and a Barlow lens, a lunar imaging camera with software, and a T64 SLR camera adaptor plus power pack and dew shield. This is going to be available to all our full members to borrow at their leisure. Here's to a great year!

Crawley Astronomical Society

Our programme of monthly meetings has proceeded as usual, but viewing sessions have been thwarted mainly by adverse weather conditions. Our open field viewing site is several miles from our meeting centre, and telescopes have to be transported to this site, which means that viewing evenings have to be advertised in advance, and cancellations have been common this autumn.

Dr. Lilian Hobbs gave us a talk on 'Remote Control of your Telescope' on Friday 16th. January, and Mr. John Axtell will be talking to us at our February meeting, to be followed by the ever popular Nik Szymanek in March.

Our talk on Nuclear Fusion Power continues to be topical and to attract interest among Clubs and Societies, and several of these talks have been given since our last report.

Croydon Astronomical Society

No change to the main committee positions, which meets every 2 months. However there have been 2 new committee members join. We now have 8 positions filled out of 10. This makes procedures a little more convenient; because the previous year we had only 6 committee members.

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

We have been working close to a couple of local schools, one primary and the secondary, who have visited our observatory, at Kenley. The primary school will be running a special science week, during March.

We have started member workshops, at the Norman Fisher Observatory. This has reasonably popular with new members. Our last observing session was clear, so was very popular. We try and hold the workshop on a members evening, at the observatory, at least once a month.

John Murrell is running a course on the how to use our Mead LX 200. This will help those who want to observe using our telescope.

We have started a newsletter called Altair. Until, 1999 we produced a journal by the same name. Due to a lack of volunteers, to edit the journal, we ceased producing it. In view that it was IYA, and the need to communicate information to all members, I decided to produce a newsletter; which I will edit on a short term basis. It is hoped this will encourage someone to become permanent editor.

Currently we are awaiting a reply from Croydon Council, in respect having a stand inside the Croydon Clocktower, for IYA. The clocktower, is next to Croydon main library. They have initial concerns regarding health and safety; however I have a friend on the council, who is deputy leader. He is currently looking into the matter.

Some of our upcoming lectures are:

Nik Szymanic: Latest CCD Images – 23 January

Konrad Malin-Smith: Redshift galaxies and the early universe – 6 February

Jerry Workman: The Apollo Programme – 20 February

Anton Vamplew: Space Crisps & Nuts – 6 March

Stuart Clarke: The Sun Kings – 3 April

Eastbourne Astronomical Society

What we are doing for IYA 2009:

Telescopes for Schools:

The society has been approached by a local school – Newlands School, Seaford, which has applied for one of the IYA 2009 telescopes. The Physics teacher

rather left it to the students to come up with the required observing plan and then asked our Secretary for comments. The plan now concentrates on lunar craters and Jupiter's Moons. This is the first school in the area who has asked for help.

Council Museum asked for help too:

The Council run the Redoubt Fortress and Military Museum. They have suggested that in their 2009 events programme they should include a practical observing evening and asked if anyone in the society could help on astronavigation aspects due to the museums naval/military connections. We said that we would be happy to help but pointed out that the Museum is not in a good 'dark sky' area.

By helping with this project we may get recognised by the council and this will help when asking to use their site of the Western Lawns on the seafront for our major IYA Spring event on 28th March.

Eyes on the Skies

This is a title of a one-hour film produced by the IAU, ESA and ESO as their part of IYA 2009. The society has managed to obtain 200 copies of the DVD which gives a professional up date of modern astronomy but in a way which could be understood by the general public. It has been agreed to give a copy of this DVD FREE of charge to every member of the Eastbourne Society who renew their subscription for 2009. This had led to a much higher number of renewals than normal. The remaining copies of the film will be offered to the general public at IYA observing events or to any member of a SAGAS Society for £ 3.00 + postage. Remember we only have 100 available!!

Practical Observing under Dark Skies:

In addition to the societies normal monthly meetings special practical observing evenings will be held some nine miles from Eastbourne in the village of Arlington where dark skies improve seeing from that of the main town. It is hoped that several of the societies telescopes will be available. In addition the village hall will be available for short, very basic astronomy talks – particularly if the weather is poor. These practical evenings will be on January 23rd, February 20th, March 20th and April 17th starting at 8pm.

IYA 2009 Spring Moon watch

It is hoped to take the field on the seafront (King Edwards Parade) which hosts many of the towns prestigious events. We will be giving this maximum publicity in the local press and will be doing observing with the public on March 28th, April 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Hopefully, at least one of these dates will be clear!

April 4th is a normal meeting when Dr. Robert Dunn – a research fellow at University of Munich will be speaking on 'Supermassive Black Holes in Clusters of Galaxies'.

Farnham Astronomical Society

The Committee

The Society's AGM took place in December. At the AGM the members voted in the existing Committee without changes:

- ♦ John Price (Chairman and Treasurer)
- ♦ Barry Bellinger (Secretary)

- ◆ Peter Campbell-Burns (Membership Secretary, Web Site Editor, SAGAS liaison)
- ◆ Eric Grieve (Librarian)
- ◆ Steve Woodbridge (Observing Co-ordinator)
- ◆ Joyce Shenton (Refreshments)
- ◆ Peter West

Contact details for the committee members are available on the society's web site (www.farnham-as.co.uk)

Membership

Our membership now stands at 40 members.

Society Activities

Our new meeting location in Church Crookham has some green space behind the hall which is ideal for organising observing activities as part of our meeting schedule. Steve Woodbridge is making every use of this by organising workshops around lunar, planetary and variable star observing. A very successful workshop was held in October 2008 and another is scheduled for our February meeting.

Recent speakers included:

- ◆ Galaxies, Formation & Evolution, Dr Claudia Maraston;
- ◆ Bubbling Cauldrons, Dr Robert Dunn;
- ◆ Cosmic Mirages David Bacon, University of Portsmouth.

The December AGM was followed by some short presentations by members, and a wonderful buffet prepared by June Bartholomew.

IYA2009

A meeting is scheduled for 26 January 2008 to decide how Farnham Astronomical Society will respond to IYA 2009.

Programme for 2009

Our speaker programme for 2009 is complete except for August:

Date	Subject	Speaker/Visit
13 Jan 09	Introduction to SAGAS	J.Axtell, G.Bryant
10 Feb 09	Variable Star Workshop	Steve Woodbridge
10 March 09	Shields for the Starship Enterprise	Dr Ruth Bamford
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	
--	--------	--

Other Business

Due to pressure of work Peter Campbell-Burns has been unable to attend recent SAGAS meetings – a situation that should improve shortly. However, we are looking for a deputy to cover future meetings when Peter is unable to attend.

In recognition of the fact that SAGAS meetings are open to all affiliated society members, we plan to publish more widely dates of SAGAS meetings to encourage more participation.

Guildford Astronomical Society

Guildford AS's programme runs from September through to July. This year we have been more stringent about stripping off late payers from our membership list, but despite this, membership is holding up well at exactly 100.

Since the SAGAS meeting in October we have commenced our first short series of beginners courses which complete this month. These have been very successful and have been attended by about 15 to 20 people on each occasion. Our last session will be a Telescope Clinic, similar to the Telescope Amnesty run at Intech. We are now switching back to training for observatory dome and telescope operation, CCD and image processing. We are very lucky in that one of our committee members helps to run a retirement home, and he makes a room available to us for this training – perhaps he is trying to drum up custom from some of our more elderly members! (My room is booked!)

We have continued our normal run of outreach work, primarily for the Cubs Astronomer Badge. We are shortly giving sessions for both junior and senior sections of the Science Club at Royal Grammar School, Guildford.

We have much in place for IYA2009 between now and the next SAGAS Meeting.

1. "She's An Astronomer" Tuesday afternoon 17th March. This is aimed at fifth and sixth formers across Surrey and beyond, and will feature three female professional astronomers/researchers
2. UK Space Conference 09, 1st to 4th April, Charterhouse School. GAS is helping to administer this event, which will this year have a strong Astronomy theme, including a "She's An Astronomer" flavour. GAS will take Solar telescopes for daytime observing and will organise a Star party for one of the main days. There will be a top class series of speakers, including a NASA astronaut – Joe Engle. Tickets will be £35 per day and will include a top quality lunch in the Charterhouse restaurant. More details can be found at <http://www.space.co.uk>.
3. We have organised a series of five public observing events scattered throughout the year. The first of these will be 12/13 February. They will be held at Newlands Corner, a local beauty spot, high elevation with a good southern aspect and a car park. We have been lucky-enough to secure the goodwill of Surrey Wildlife Trust who are making their Visitor Centre available to us, so that we can run a presentation indoors if the weather is poor. These sessions will be advertised using

the RAS posters made available via the Federation and in the local press.

East Sussex Astronomical Society

The Society resolved to advertise their meetings in a free circulating newspaper Friday Ad. This has shown an increased number of participants at meetings but it is not clear whether they will become members.

Twenty members had a interesting and thought provoking visit to Hampshire Astronomical Group. We were warmly welcomed and impressed by their five telescopes in operation. We particularly liked their refuge being a warm and friendly place where we periodically returned for a hot tea or coffee. Many thanks to Hampshire.

We have arranged several observing sessions including solar observing and the Quaranids. Sadly all these were cancelled due to rain or cloud.

With this being the International Year of Astronomy the Society held a talk in December 2008 on what to look for in buying binoculars or a telescope. This talk well researched and informative and was given by one of our experienced members Roy Bicknell. It was followed by some hands on making of a cross staff which faithfully measured celestial angles.

January saw a fascinating lecture by Dr Robert Smith of Sussex University on Supernovae.

February will see us again with a hands-on experiment. With a selection of lenses can we make a Galilean telescope? All those attending in February will have the option to take part and build their on telescope.

March sees four events our usual monthly meeting on 5th March 2009 when we have Lisette Petrie a visiting speaker talking Exoplanets. This will go well with the four year NASA launch of Kepler and the four year search for exoplanets. We also have our annual Quiz which is open to all not just ESAS members. We have a visit to Greenwich where we will be guests of the Flamsteed Society. We end March with a visit to the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill for a Moonwatch as part of the IYA 2009.

April sees one of our members a talented, well-read and popular speaker Peter Bolwell with a talk entitled "Astronomy in Science Fiction".

We have had requests to visit Scouts and Guides and hope to assist them in achieving their astronomy badge.

We are still working on plans to celebrate IYA 2009. So far it is a busy year ahead.

Hampshire Astronomical Group

Hampshire Astronomical Group begins the New Year in a healthy state. Membership remains constant and funding to maintain current activities is good.

The Group recently had an evaluation of the buildings on site for insurance purposes and we were surprised that the value of the buildings alone came to £¼ million. When a conservative estimate of all the telescopes and ancillary equipment was added, this figure rose to just under £¹/₃ million.

We are involved with a schoolteacher awareness programme in conjunction with Hampshire County Council and the INTECH planetarium. We have also been part of a number of INTECH's regular telescope evenings along with other SAGAS members.

The Group believed there was a need for good quality display material and we are currently putting together a display using images taken by members, either on their own equipment or on equipment available to them at the observatory. This display material will also be used as part of any IYA2009 event during the forthcoming year.

Sky Quality measurements are now regularly taken at the Clanfield observatory site in order to measure the effect of the new PFI lighting scheme that is being developed to cover, Hampshire, West Sussex and Southampton. (It is suggested to other SAGAS societies in the area of the PFI consider undertaking similar measurements – this can be discussed at a future SAGAS meeting). This scheme will last for 25 years and involves the replacement of all lighting columns and their maintenance. The Group has been involved in discussions at the PFI planning stage.

IYA 2009

Extensive plans for IYA2009 are well advanced with the moon watch week planned for the spring and another open week planned for the autumn.

There will be a visit to Sion House during the summer for members.

Additional lectures have been planned for the year beginning with Dr Keith Strong (an ex-Hampshire Astronomical Group member) now a principle investigator for a solar science mission with Lockheed Martin providing an additional lecture in April.

All Hampshire Astronomical Group activities can be found on the Group's web site at www.hantsastro.org.uk

Vectis Astronomical Society

Weekly meetings at the observatory are continually well attended by about 20 people. Our monthly meetings are also well supported with about 50 people attending. We have 120 members (to be confirmed on Sat).

Plans for the Isle of Wight Star Party are going well, with over 25 people reserving their spots, even before official bookings have opened. It is great to see many of last year's delegates planning to return.

For IYA we are planning one outreach event each month. The first will be "An evening of public stargazing" at the Public House - the Pointer Inn, Newchurch, on Sunday 25th Jan. On February 5th, we are combining with the Island Storytellers during National Storytelling Week for an evening of "Starrytelling" at the Quay Arts Centre in Newport. In March 7th, we will be at Brading Roman Villa, observing the night sky.

We also have a new web site and address - www.wightastronomy.org.

Wadhurst Astronomical Society

The society has now implemented the "Talk for Membership" scheme and a few members seem interested. The rule is that for a talk of no less than 45 minutes plus a Q&A session a member can claim exemption for the years membership fee of £15. It is expected that some members will still pay their membership fee, although but even if they don't, it still makes financial sense in that the cost of an outside speaker is likely to exceed the £15.

We are changing the format of our meetings. They will now comprise the Society News and Introduction of the speaker followed by a coffee & biscuit break. After this there will be a beginners introduction to astronomy for example a short presentation on eyepieces or mounts etc. Following this there will be another short presentation on the Celestial Sphere and what to watch for this month. When all this is done we will then be over to the pub as usual! Details will be finalised at our Committee meeting on the 13th January.

The society has just purchased a new screen from eBay at a cost of £102. It is of superb construction and has a normal retail price of £250.

Since the last SAGAS Meeting our speakers and events have been as follows:

October - Two video presentations on Einstein's General and Special theories of relativity.

November- John Murrell gave us a brilliant talk on Gamma Ray Bursters.

December – One of our members gave a talk on the "Life of Stars" under our free membership offer.

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

Phil Berry had a meeting at his home to show members his new Dome. Another is planned for the future as the dome rotation and automation is now completed.

Wealden Astronomical Society

Our E magazine, The Sirius news, produced bi-monthly, is released at the time of our meetings. The next issue of the News is due on the 14th February. The magazine usually consists of 12 pages, but according to contents and input from members can vary from 10 to 14 pages.

We will try this year in the International Year of Astronomy to include more images, hopefully from within our own ranks. To this effect at our next meeting there will be a presentation based on astrophotography. This will try and encourage the members to take images of anything relating to the sky from sunsets/sunrises to imaging through a telescope. Most people have a digital camera and so the emphasis will be on using an ordinary camera to take pictures in low light. The use of a tripod and time exposures will be the main focus of the presentation. The Chairman (Chris Ellis) an experienced photographer, will

present the talk showing the members the basic equipment and techniques required to produce an image.