

## **SOCIETY REPORTS**

Submitted by Member Societies for the SAGAS Meeting on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009

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

*Basingstoke, Brighton & Hove, Hampshire, Horsham, Lewes, Newbury, Orpington, Richmond & Kew, Solent, Southdowns,*

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

### **Ashford Astronomical Society**

2009 has been a great year for the Ashford Astronomical Society. Our ranks have now swelled to 47 paid up members. Most of whom regularly attend our monthly meetings.

Our move to the village of Woodchurch is an ongoing success, of the 8 meetings we have had since January 2009, only two have been overcast, which means that most meetings have had meaningful observing possible outside once the meetings have concluded inside. This has been a big hit with the membership, most of whom do not as yet own their own telescopes.

We are now in the final stages of organising our contribution to IYA2009. Our exhibition entitled Astrobash. We are expecting in the region of 300 visitors to the event on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2009. We will have a multimedia planetarium staffed by the University of Kent Astrophysics Dept. A working satellite ground receiving station which will be able to make contact with weather satellites and beam their live images onto one of our large screens. Astronomical talks every hour from our in house speakers, using radio microphones and projection technology. A Lunar lander game also using projection technology, a working Solar telescope weather permitting, displays from our neighbouring societies who are taking part in the event too, a full size working Dalek, a bouncy castle, paint your own rocket and planet crafts for the younger visitors. We will also have two Astro retailers on hand to display and give advice on choosing your next telescope set up, and much, much more. The day will culminate weather permitting in a large 'Star Party' at the end of the day in the field behind the venue.

We also took part in the 2009 Challock Goose Fair in September. 200 stalls, a fairground and an arena are set up every year in this village just to the north of Ashford. It attracts many thousands of visitors. We have made many new friends through this event alone.

We have had requests for talks from several schools and the Women's Institute, which we will be honouring in due course, hopefully this year. We hope to build on this success in 2010.

### **Cody Astronomical Society**

Nothing out of the ordinary to report, Cody soldiers on with regular lectures and observing sessions at its observatory.

## **Crawley Astronomical Society**

Crawley has a new WEB site. [www.crawleyas.co.uk](http://www.crawleyas.co.uk) This has been operation since late August.

Our AGM was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> October and there were no changes to the officers of the Society. Membership is recorded as 28 paid up but we would like to see it increase to more than 35. Subscriptions were held at £20 for Adult member and £15 for Seniors and those in education. Our programme of Speakers for 2009/2010 is almost complete .

We have held two outreach events in Crawley during IYA. Our first event was on the 6<sup>th</sup> June in Crawley's central Square as part of the Borough Councils Showcase for Clubs and Societies in Crawley. The event was very rewarding we were visited by the new lady Mayor who was impressed by the display boards supplied though SAGAS. She spent time talking to us and for our part we were able to raise the question of light pollution. We presented her with the booklet published by the Campaign for Dark Skies which she accepted. Crawley's new Library was the venue of our second event, held on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. This was as part of the Library's Quest Seekers Day for young people. The event was again rewarding with very many young people coming to our stand all keen to look through our Telescopes. During IYA we have also been assisting in a small way at Guildford A.S. events at Newlands Corner observing evenings during May and September. We also had members with their Telescopes at the Big Look Up on the 28<sup>th</sup> August run jointly by Surrey University and Guildford A.S. This event was spectacular our member reported being overwhelmed by the number of people queuing up to view the Moon and later Jupiter through their Telescopes. We are looking forward to providing help at the forthcoming outreach events run by Guildford.

## **Croydon Astronomical Society**

No change to the main committee positions, which meets every 2 months, although we are co-opting a member onto the committee who will take over as Treasurer.

Currently membership stands on average around 70 signed up members, with an additional 3 life members. It should be noted that we do not have a membership fee. It is the case that members renew, not on our usual renewal date, around September, but usually renew on the anniversary they joined.

We are running a couple outreach projects with a local school and scout group. I recently visited a primary school during their science week. I gave the children a talk about the solar system and the glories of galaxies and nebulae. In addition I showed them what goes on at the Norman Fisher Observatory. Additionally we have given advice to a scout group on the scout badge. There appears to be greater interest this year for visits of scouts, cubs, brownies, schools etc. We are fully booked through to February.

There is a planned Moonwatch on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, at the Norman Fisher Observatory. We hope to link up with other societies throughout the UK and USA, via Twitter, which will be fronted by Newbury AS.

The society had a successful visit to Otford, for a walk around the planets last July. It was a pity we did not have more people. It was a lovely clear and warm day for the event.

Other main activities, were summer sagas, when 14 members travelled to Portsmouth all on the same train. It was a great day, well done Graham.

Our newsletter has been going 9 months, and is doing well. We have a permanent editor for Altair, which has taken some of the strain off myself. The biggest problem is the lack of articles from members. They seem to enjoy reading it but not submitting articles.

## **East Sussex Astronomical Society**

We were very lucky to have Dr Chris Lintott to talk to us at our AGM in September 2009. His talk was on GalaxyZoo 2 and he reprised it for the Herstmonceux Astronomical Festival, which we also attended, a week later. We have also put a lot of effort in getting a full list of speakers and we now have speakers lined up for the next 12 months.

We have spent a large amount of time on our website. We are using a content management system called Mambo and we have taken the opportunity with 4 of us to remove old components that did not work and to add new ones that did. We now have a Gallery, a repository for files and a forum. We were a little taken aback when we had several apparent users join our Forum only to discover that it was set off by software targeting our forum and designed to hijack our Forum to disseminate spam under the banner "Get your message out". We foiled that by increasing our security settings.

We have also added a wiki to our website. This is only accessible and viewable by invitation only and it is designed to allow the Society's projects to be discussed and progressed. If another Society wants to try this we would be happy to point to the software we are using.

We have had several observing sessions. Our Solar viewing from the De La Warr Pavilion has been popular, as has viewing from our Darksite with our 12" LX90. The latter has given us some trouble though. The Autostar handset failed and we replaced it with a new one from Telescope House. The new one we could not get working properly. The movement of the telescope was erratic. We ended up delivering both scope and handset to Telescope House for an overhaul. The scope is now working. We have one issue and that is that the Goto takes much longer (about a minute in all) before the scope is finally on target even though it has beeped to say it is. We have noted that we are not alone and that this behaviour is being suffered by another user on the Yahoo LX90 forum.

We will be supporting the IYA 2009 Moonwatch with four days at the De La Warr pavilion from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

We hope to do a school's Moonwatch in November but have not finalised this at the time of this report.

## Eastbourne Astronomical Society

The total membership of the Eastbourne society stands exactly the same as last year at 102 with 11 new members and 2 re-joiners from previous years which exactly balancing the non-renewals.

Following the IYA 2009 'Spring Moon watch' event which was badly let down by poor publicity the society is having two more public observing sessions for the Autumn Moon Watch, these will be held on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October and Sunday 25<sup>th</sup>.at Helen Gardens, a small park on the Eastbourne seafront. We have been promised more publicity this time.

The Observing evenings are held nine miles from the town in the village of Arlington and increasing in popularity with a short basic talk now takes place in the village hall if the weather is poor , so members are still encouraged to attend regardless of observing conditions. The talks are to be more structured and cover a range of subjects, however they will be far more informal than the normal meetings. Seven dates from October to April have been planned. This year we hope to be joined by the Lewes Astronomers making it a more inter-society event.

On the financial side the society were able to purchase 200 'Eyes of the Skies' DVDs and made a good profit from them. Only a few remain. Speakers expenses fell as we had only 5 visiting speakers instead of 7 or 8 and they all came from relatively nearby. In the past we have paid for speakers from all over the country. The Gift Aid tax recovery continued to be a significant source of income being £ 209. The treasurer is to recommend to the AGM on 10<sup>th</sup> October that the subscription should remain at £10, being one of the cheapest of any local society.

The library of the society is used by 34% of the membership. The society has a total of 190 books and in the last year 49 different titles were borrowed. In all 71 books were borrowed in the year, slightly up on the 63 in the year before. The most popular book is '**Bang**' by Brian May, Patrick Moore and Chris Lintott that has been borrowed nine times in the past two years. The second most popular being Iain Nicholson's '**Dark Side of the Universe**' which has been borrowed seven times. The society continues to get both books and DVD/Videos donated to the library. Discussion will be taking place on the size of the library taking into account that 122 books have not been borrowed in the last two years.

The society has purchased speaker amplifier equipment costing £235.92 following a comment at the last AGM that people could not hear all the speakers at the back of the hall at our meetings.

The society own five telescopes and a pair of 25x 100 binoculars. Renovation of the Dobsonian 12" is under way. These instruments will be used at the observing evenings where members are also encouraged to bring along their own equipment.

The society was present at the Herstmonceux Astronomy Festival led by Gordon Taylor who is also the Director of the computer section of the BAA. and a committee member of the Eastbourne society.

# Farnham Astronomical Society

## Membership

After a clear-out of members yet to pay 2009 subscriptions our membership now stands at 39 paid-up members. However, we are seeing a steady number of enquiries and three new members signed-up at our October meeting.

## Web Site

The most significant event since the last report has been the launch of a new web site for the society. Our new web site is based on a content management system rather than static pages and it is our aim to run the web site more like an on-line magazine.

- Content can be posted much more quickly and easily making our site look less like a brochure with static and outdated content;
- There are now many more ways to find content on our site:
  - Items can be searched for using a Google-style search box
  - Items can be found by selecting a category or a keyword from the tag list,
  - Items can be listed according to criteria such as most visited or most commented,
  - Articles can be found according to the month published,
  - Articles on related topics can be found using a 'related articles' list;
- Members can more easily keep informed of members activity by subscribing to our RSS feed; We also present latest news from external astronomy sites such as Astronomy Now and APOD;
- The site has better search engine optimisation – in other words the site is more search engine friendly. It will be easier to find content on our site using search engines such as Google and our content will rank more highly in search engine listings;
- The new site supports tagging of content; this is now an important component of the online publishing process; it allows editors to build associations and search keywords through which any type of content can be found;
- Visitors can leave comments on articles and images posted to the site.

We are seeing articles posted on the web site visible in Google search results within TWO minutes of the article being published.

## Outreach

The Society will be hosting an observing evening with the Beaver Scouts at Garner's Field Tilford on Oct 24<sup>th</sup>.

We have been asked by Mytchett Primary School to run an observing evening at the school. This will take place on 24th November 2009 along with two organised visits to the Aldershot Observatory in October.

Any members of local societies who wish to join us at any of these events will be most welcome.

### **Presentation by Dr Chris Lintott**

Sadly Dr Chris Lintott sent his apologies - he could not attend our October meeting; instead he is covering the LCROSS impact (Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite) for Sky at Night. Although a huge disappointment, we hope to reschedule Chris' presentation for 2010.

The organisation of this presentation threw up an interesting question when organising speakers of this notoriety. Given the small meeting space available to us - how do we ensure that we do not have to turn people away if ever reach the hall capacity. It was suggested that events like this could be run on a ticket basis but this was thought to be inappropriate when speakers give their time on an expenses-only basis. Are there any other societies who have faced a similar issue who would be willing to share their experience?

Unfortunately a replacement speaker on Galaxy Zoo could be arranged and instead we presented some short ESA videos and an interview with Jocelyn Bell Burnell. The latter was obtained from the Jodcast web site and is highly recommended listening.

### **Foredown Tower Astronomers**

As part of the IYA2009, the newly constituted Foredown Tower Astronomers arranged series of monthly talks, on a Sunday afternoon, in conjunction with the Brighton & Hove City Council and at the Foredown Tower. In April the talk was unsurprisingly about "Telescopes", whereas the May talk was "Animals in the Sky" about the constellations and appropriately the audience included a large booked group of veterinary nurses! The June presentation was about Jupiter and the July was "Rocks from Space" by Dave Harris of the British & Irish Meteorite Society. For the August presentation, Trevor Little of the Adur Astronomical Society showed and talked about the huge "Moon Image" that he had a hand in making and for September we returned to the planets, for a talk about Saturn. Average attendance, members and visitors was 33 people. The final talk will take place in October and will return to the subject of telescopes.

### **Guildford Astronomical Society**

Paid-up membership currently stands at 80 but we expect that to increase to about 110 when the remaining renewal stragglers pay up at our November meeting, the cut-off date.

Our Summer Social took the form of a Skittle Evening held in June. The AGM was in July; there were no changes to the officers, but we are pleased that the Committee has expanded to 14 in total.

We were very pleased that the lunar image we took was selected by the RAS for the UK part of the IYA Moon For All Mankind montage.

GAS was featured in a five-page article entitled 'Star Gazing in Surrey' which appeared in June's edition of *Surrey Life Magazine*. GAS member Julia Gaudelli is featured in a BBC News Channel web article. The interview went out world-wide

on BBC World Service, and was timed to coincide with The Great Look Up (see below) and the launch of The British Science Festival which was held this year in Guildford.

Six GAS members attended the Equinox Star Party at Kelling Heath.

Our website has been revamped, with increased functionality in the Members Area, including an on-line booking system for our observatory, webmail and a bulletin board.

Our existing observatory with its massive 90-yr old 20.5" reflector continues to need – and get – enthusiastic care, attention and upgrades from our own membership.

Our Projects Group continues its imaging observations of epsilon Aurigae, and very quickly identified the start of the eclipse.

Our next major project will be geared towards purchasing a suitable mount and pier for longer exposure imaging than can currently be achieved with our existing set-up. Some training will be conducted for new members in basic astronomy, observatory procedures and image capture using CCD, but this year our major training effort will be concentrating on image processing.

Not surprisingly, our year has been dominated by IYA Outreach work. Since the last SAGAS Meeting we have held five significant events.

1. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of our series of five "A Tour of The Night Sky" events were held at Newlands Corner on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 29<sup>th</sup> May and 25<sup>th</sup> September; attracting an estimated 120, 150 and 200 visitors respectively. These were advertised in the local papers, on BBC Radio Surrey and via an extensive poster campaign. Crawley AS are welcome supporters of this event, regularly providing six or more telescopes.
2. On May Bank Holiday we had a stall at The Surrey County Show which annually attracts 40,000 visitors. More than 100 of these stopped to look through our Solar telescopes.
3. On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> The Great Look Up took place, attracting 350 visitors. This was jointly organised by University of Surrey and Guildford AS. The Uni provided the AstroTurf pitches and an indoor room of their Varsity Centre. They also provided a outdoor stage area with plasma screens and a PA, as well as a BBQ. The event was advertised daily for a week on The Eagle Radio and in a 10,000-leaflet drop via a local newspaper. Maggie Philbin opened the event with a short talk. This was followed by another from Surrey Satellite Ltd's Dr Stuart Eves and then GAS's John Axtell took visitors through the night sky objects that would be seen. During the evening GAS's Stellacam (purchased via an RAS grant) was connected to one of the large plasma screens. This was used for Lunar sketching, which is now a regular feature of our outreach events. GAS provided 20 telescopes at this event and a further 10 were provided by members from Crawley, Cody and Croydon, together with Hants Astro, who ran a Telescope Clinic. TGLU had its own website and Facebook page and there were regular updates using Facebook and Twitter throughout the evening.

Apart from these events we have held several other daytime events at village fetes, for Surrey Wildlife Trust, and as part of the British Science Festival. Our

total visitor headcount for this year's public events now exceeds 1000. There have also been numerous evening events for cubs, scouts and guides. We have We have a further five of these lined up before Xmas, and our last Newlands Corner public event will be on Friday November 20<sup>th</sup>, all local societies are more than welcome to join in.

## **Hampshire Astronomical Group**

Hampshire Astronomical Group has recently had their AGM and there are no changes in officers of the Group, although there were some small changes to members of the committee.

Membership remains steady at approximately 160 members and as yet we have not seen any effects of the recession on membership but we did not increase the membership fees this year.

At the observatory we have installed a weather station and this is available to anyone who wishes to review the data from our website. We have also installed a sky sensor so that members living away from the observatory can review the sky conditions from home in order to check whether it is worth while coming to the observatory (cloudy or clear).

This year we are embarking on a number of observational projects with a number of students from the University of Portsmouth as part of the final year Mathematics with Astronomy Bachelors of Science degree.

Ron Arbour (Hampshire Astronomical Group member) last week discovered his 21<sup>st</sup> supernova. This supernova was confirmed by David Briggs (Hampshire Astronomical Group member) from the Clanfield observatory. We continue to have open evenings and specialised educational visits to the observatory as part of the IYA 2009, moon watch weeks and weekends.

We have had a number of outreach events during this summer which have included Young Carers event at Fairthorne Manor in Southampton and Space Week at INTECH, plus a number of village fayres etc. where we have had displays.

Next year we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we are currently looking at ways to celebrate this event. So far these include a sit down meal and a BBQ style event at the observatory. There may be others.

The group is currently looking at the impact of the ISA legislation on our activities and there is a section on the agenda today on this topic for discussion. The Group has also set up a contingency fund which we wish to use for unexpected events and will have the equivalent of about 1 year's running cost of the observatory in the fund. Currently this stands at about £4,000.

## **Vectis Astronomical Society**

AGM held in August with some changes in officers:

Chairman	Lucy Rogers
Secretary	Laura Boyle
Treasurer	Richard Flux

We currently have 135 members.

A membership survey has recently been conducted, to which about a quarter of the membership responded. From the survey results, we are looking into ways forward for the Society. This has included increasing the number of evenings that the observatory is open from one to three evenings per week.

IYA activities continue at a rate of approximately two per month, amazingly (or perhaps not) whenever observing sessions have been attempted we have not experienced completely clear skies for a single one!

### Star Party

The third Isle of Wight Star Party will be held from Thursday 11th to Monday 15th March, 2010. New moon is the 15th March. It will again be held at Brighstone Holiday Centre, which offers unparalleled southerly views across the Channel. We are hoping to offer a wider selection of accommodation including camping, rooms (as in previous years) and self-catering chalets for groups or families. If you would like to express an interest in attending please email [info@iowstarparty.org](mailto:info@iowstarparty.org), stating how many will be in your party and what sort of accommodation you require. This helps us in planning, and is in no way a commitment on your behalf to attend. Any questions, please ask - more details will be posted on [www.iowstarparty.org](http://www.iowstarparty.org) when things are sorted out and we have an initial idea of numbers and demand. There is also the IOW Star Party forum, which can be found from the web site. As in previous years, no firm bookings will be taken for the Star Party until January.

## **Wadhurst Astronomical Society**

### **Membership**

Paid membership is now increasing as a result of our steps to increase membership announced in the last report. In addition we have several non-members willing to pay £2 on the door each month.

### **Speakers & Events**

Our trial of the membership for a talk has been very successful with 7 members giving presentations not all took up the free membership option.

**May** John Axtell gave a talk on "Sputnik in Context".

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

**July** Due to a last minute cancellation John Murrell kindly stepped in and gave a presentation on "The Virtual Observatory"

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

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

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

**November** Phil Berry gives a presentation on "Iridium Flares"

**December** A member, Paul Treadaway gives a talk about the telescope he is making in celebration of the IYA.

**November 27th** We hope to hold a single one night Moonwatch at Phil Berry's observatory for Sparrows Green local residents and members of our Society. This will be a repeat of the event which was held in April. We had a media show and a stall complete with rolling presentation and Orrery with live projections of the Moon from the observatory.

### **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. A high Court Judge has now deemed the planning permission illegal .

### **Wealden Astronomical Society**

On Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup> October the Wealden A.S. held its last ordinary meeting for 2009, the next gathering will be on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December when we will hold our annual Christmas dinner at the Bull Inn, West St.Leonards. It was a short meeting attended by 15 members at the Observatory Science Centre nr. Hertsmonceux. For the first part of the evening session all the attendant members were available to talk to a group of invited guests of the OSC that were being given a tour of the Centre by members of OSC staff. We were introduced to a gathering of professional lecturers and representatives of the Sciences as they were shown around the various facilities of the former Observatory. After the group had said their farewells and departed we continued with the business of the evening starting with the arrangements for Christmas Party. Steve our Treasurer collected the deposits for the dinner and collecting the menu forms. All entries for our astrophoto competition were discussed and with some still to come in then it was extended into early November. Judging to take place late November with the prize giving taking place at the Christmas party. A quiz is being set up for the Christmas party with twenty questions, all astronomical, to be set, three answers per question. The meeting ended at 9.30.

### **Wessex Astronomical Society**

The observatory at Durlston, which many of our members helped to fund, was available for public events and for use by members from last autumn. Since then of the 9 public events scheduled only two were called off due to cloud. The other 7 have been successful with visitor numbers ranging from the lowest of 25 to more than 80 at two of the recent events. Many members have brought telescopes along to the events to help satisfy the growing interest from members of the public, which has enormously helped in making these evenings a success. All this has been part of what we decided would be our contribution to IYA2009, as has using the observatory to support visits by school groups, Swanage Cubs and several other clubs or societies. Images made using the telescope have been used in talks and exhibits to illustrate the work of the Society.

Membership is currently 113, compared to 130 a year ago. Attendance at meetings hasn't materially altered I believe, typically around 90; we've had the usual well-attended talks. This year is of course immediately after we jumped the annual sub up, and I know we are getting more 'pay-per-view' attendees. The annual Sub is £15, and we charge £2 for visitors, so you need to come to 8 meetings to be worth being a member, unless you want to take advantage of other facilities, such as telescope loans, library, etc

### **Worthing Astronomers**

Since the April SAGAS meeting WA have been busy. We helped out a guy who had purchased a telescope from eBay and was unable to use it. As it transpired,

the power socket was broken and when an external one was fitted he was away! Unfortunately he never came back and joined the group. But we all put it down to experience and at least it was a good turn in the IYA!

During the summer months we held two BBQs, free to the members, one for the Summer Solstice and one to celebrate the Apollo 11 Moonlanding anniversary. The weather for the latter was not really summer-like but everyone did enjoy themselves.

Taking a break from public sidewalk astronomy over the summer months, we resumed these with a Moonwatch/Planet Watch weekend where we met several of our members we hadn't yet seen, plus acquired a few more.

Over the next months we will be holding another, this time a weeklong, Moonwatch/Planetwatch event alongside other societies on the IYA week at the end of October. After that we shall be holding an exhibition of members' work in our local library. For our members we shall be providing some evenings when there will be the chance to brush up on or learn the constellations, something that showed up on the sidewalk astronomy events, these days when everyone has go-to equipment, the basics such as the need of knowing what the stars/constellations are can be overlooked. We also hope to introduce some lunar surface drawings nights as well.

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