

SOCIETY REPORTS

Submitted by Member Societies for the SAGAS Meeting on Saturday 16th January 2009

No reports have been received from the following societies by the time this document was compiled:

Basingstoke, Brighton & Hove, Hampshire, Horsham, Lewes, Newbury, Orpington, Richmond & Kew, Solent, Vectis, Wessex

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

Ashford Astronomical Society hopes to build on it's success during IYA2009. Our membership has grown to 60 members, from around 25 at the beginning of last year.

We are in the final stages of formalising our programme of events and meetings for the coming year. We have speakers for 80% of the calendar already, with no problems in finding speakers for the remaining slots. We hope to spring a few surprises for our members this year with some special guests hopefully. Please see our website www.ashfordastro.org.uk for further details.

We are looking forward immensely to visiting our neighbouring society CADSAS in April to have a look at their 22" Alan Young telescope and facilities. CADSAS kindly helped us at our Astrobash exhibition in October, and we welcome increased interaction between AAS and CADSAS in future, whom we consider good friends of ours.

Our outward programme is still in full swing, with presentations to local schools, and the Ashford Womens Institute on the cards.

We are also presenting and overseeing the Astronomy badge course to our local Beavers, Cubs and Brownies. This has been an extremely fulfilling exercise to be a part of.

Our committee now consists of :- Drew Wagar (Chairman), Jason Hall (Secretary), Steve Wellsted (Imaging and Equipment), Jill Perkins (Treasurer), and Monika Butcher (Meetings Coordinator). Dave Styles has stepped down as treasurer, but remains an active, and valuable member of the society.

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Jason Hall, Secretary, Ashford Astronomical Society.

Cody Astronomical Society

Current membership is 38

Lectures: Marco Bruni from Portsmouth Uni on Gravitational Wave Astronomy. Very good. Very interesting. scored 4.15 out of 5.

Tom Maccarnoe from Southampton Uni on Stellar Collisions and near Misses. Excellent. Very interesting. Scored 3.8 out of 5

I would recommend both of these, but watch out for Tom's speed of delivery!

Outreach: We are running monthly outreach activities for cub and scout groups. Intech; we supported their Telescope Amnesty in November and are gearing up for the next one on Jan 27.

We have been asked to host a visit to our Observatory by The Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications. This will take place in February. The programme will be Observing if possible, Talks by Gordon Lloyd - Chaos and planet orbits and Observers equipment by Phil Alner.

Phil Alner, Chairman Cody AS

Crawley Astronomical Society

Since the last SAGAS meeting in October Crawley has held three formal meetings. Our November meeting held on the 21st had as the guest speaker Conrad Malin-Smith who took as his theme Relativity for the non Mathematician. December is our Festive meeting when by tradition we over indulge in mince pies as a reward for racking our brains in the Annual Xmas quiz. We were also entertained by our member Peter Webb who gave a short talk on his trip to China to see the 2009 Solar Eclipse. January 15th and Alan Drummond addresses us on the subject of Globular Star Clusters.

The period between our December and January meetings is cause for production of the Winter News Letter. Its purpose is twofold, first to provide a good read on cold winter nights and secondly to remind members of the forth coming meeting dates and excellent speakers who have agreed to come to address them during the months ahead. This was dispatched to our members in the first few days of January.

Our list of speakers are as follows:

Friday February 19 th 2010	Dr Lucie Green , MSSSL	The Hinone Satellite mission to the Sun
Friday March 19 th 2010	Mr Ian Currie	Making sense of the Weather
Friday April 16 th 2010	Members Evening	Members speak their own projects
Friday May 21 st 2010	Mr Bob Mizon FRAS	Binoculars in Astronomy.
Friday June 18 th 2010	Mr Jack Martin	Astro Spectrography.

Neil Morrison, Chairman Crawley Astronomical Society.

Croydon Astronomical Society

No change to the main committee positions, which meets every 2 months, although we have co-opting a member onto the committee, to 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 were involved with a Moonwatch on Friday 30th and Saturday 31st October, at the Norman Fisher Observatory. It was hoped to link up with other societies throughout the UK and USA, via Twitter, which will be fronted by Newbury AS. Unfortunately the cloud beat us.

However in a separate event for the Geminid meteor shower, called Meteorwatch, again fronted by Adrian West of Newbury AS. This time we were blessed with clear skies and over the nights of 12th and 13th December. Pictures and reports by ourselves and others from around the world were broadcast on the social networking sites, Twitter and Facebook.

We are planning a visit to William Herschel's in Bath, later this year, and will be attending Summer SAGAS in Guildford.

During this we have been inundated by scout and guide groups wanting to visit the observatory or wanting someone to visit them. We were fully booked at last November. It was a pity though to cancel 4 visits due to poor weather conditions. I have visited myself 3 primary schools and 5 scout groups.

Our newsletter has been going a year now. The problem has been lack of articles by members, which has resulted in a couple additions to be combined with the next month. It may also be time for a revamp of the format. I will therefore be speaking to our secretary and Altair editor in the next few months.

Paul Harper, Chairman, Croydon AS

East Sussex Astronomical Society

Since our last report we have moved on with our internal wiki.

A problem shared by all Societies is how to keep Committee members abreast of developments within the Society. Many Societies (the local BLODS is a good example) make extensive use of the phone to ring round with updates or to ask for help. The phone system however is a clumsy tool for this. The person at the receiving end needs to be available to take the call. The recipient might not be the best person to help on a particular point and may suggest that someone else is asked. Other committee members do not know what has been said to other members. This causes a second wave of phone calls between members. Misinterpretations and misunderstanding can often occur.

ESAS has relied on email and phone and the reviewing the minutes of the last meeting at the next. More frequent committee meetings can be the answer but that is unpopular.

So is there an IT solution which would allow all committee members to be kept up to date and yet would not over burden one member of the committee. There is. It is Mediawiki. We have used Mediawiki (which is free to use) as a solution to this problem.

I digress slightly as I do not know if you heard of wikipedia. If you have then you can skip to the next paragraph. The wikipedia is a collaborative product of many people and has been built in the space of a few years as a valuable resource of general knowledge. Even ESAS has a page on wikipedia! No entry for SAGAS as yet. The concept of wikipedia is that good will out. Collaboration is the key to its success. A collaborator can add, delete and create content.

So ESAS has set up its own private wikipedia. This is not a wiki to garner general knowledge. It is not a wiki to gather information about astronomy. This wiki is solely for the Society's projects. It provides a factual account of the state of where projects have reached. It allows all members, who have access, to check the current status of any of the Society's projects. It allows easy editing and there is also a discussion tab where queries and suggestion can be posted. That is not all. Wiki has a built in history so it is always possible to see an earlier version. Just like the wikipedia you can include web links both to external sites and to other internal pages.

The result is that on any current project you will be up to speed as to where it has reached even where the effort expended in the project has been over many months. The observatory project that the Society built at the Dark Site took 3 years is a good example. A wiki page would describe the idea, the problems, the construction and the completion.

As projects are completed then the wiki will hold useful information about the project which may help to inform future projects of the Society.

Projects are not owned by one member though they may well be directed by a single member, they are projects of the Society as it goes about its aim to advance the education of the public in the science of astronomy.

It would be a useful tool for SAGAS. I wonder if SAGAS would be interested in adopting this for astronomical projects as it would be one way of harnessing the experience that so far is available in many Societies but locked away because other Societies do not know what each other is doing.

Our format of monthly meetings goes ahead apace. We finished off 2009 with Ian King on Astrophotography. Ian King gave a fascinating talk and inspired members to put their camera to work. November saw Jacqueline Mitten with a "Woman's Place is in the Dome" telling just how many female astronomers there have been and are. Her talk rebalanced the contribution to astronomy by the fairer sex. December saw Peter Gill from the Eastbourne Astronomical Society on our nearest stellar neighbour The Sun. If you have heard Peter talk you will know how polished he is.

For January we had lined up our own Secretary Simon Allen showing what Galileo saw 400 years ago. Sadly the inclement weather caused this talk to be postponed. Indeed the weather has blighted our solar viewing and meteor watching sessions. One casualty of this was the School's Moonwatch which we tried at a local primary school but were met with rain only minutes after setting up.

We look forward to the new year with better weather than we had so far.

Simon S. Allen, Secretary to ESAS

Eastbourne Astronomical Society

2010 is an important year for the Eastbourne Astronomical Society. This year it will be 50 years year's old. It was in the Spring of 1960 when Patrick Moore visited, the then, Eastbourne Grammar School. In the audience were two enthusiastic amateurs who, with Patrick's encouragement formed the Eastbourne Group of the Junior Astronomical Society. All members of the Education Committee of the council were circularised and the Chairman of the committee, Sir Gilbert Foyle (of Foyle bookshop fame) became very interested in the group and his continued support in the early years was to be vital to the success.

The success of the group was truly 'meteoric'. On November 26th 1960 a major exhibition was held which attracted 300 people and opened by the Mayor. For a society just seven months old this was some achievement!.

Dr J.G. Porter, who became patron of the society and Patrick Moore were the speakers. Councillor Foyle became President of the group and donated £ 50 to the society towards their first observatory.

For all this history the society has been considering how to celebrate this anniversary. It is a fact that one of the societies 103 members just happens to be the current Mayor of Eastbourne and he has agreed to help with publicity.

One member of committee has agreed to be the society archivist forming an archive with some of the early publications. It has also been agreed to produce a formal history of the society for the first time and already some of the very early members have been found – as far away as Canada and Northern Scotland, to help write the history.

At the Christmas meeting Dr. John Gribbin gave a talk to a packed house on the subject 'In Search of the Multiverse', which is also the title of his new book which has been purchased by the society for the library. The customary Mince Pies were served in the coffee break.

The weather has effected the society. The observing meeting held 9 miles from Eastbourne in the village of Arlington was cancelled due to icy road conditions and, for the first time in many years the main meeting in January was cancelled too due to snow. The monthly observing events will now be a joint event with members of The Lewes Astronomers.

The amplifying equipment purchased for £235.92 for use at the meetings has been used for the first time. It is having a few problems, some say it is too loud! But over all members at the back of the hall are now happy they can hear the speaker.

Since the AGM on 10th October 60 members have renewed and four new members have joined.

Keith Brakenborough, Librarian, Eastbourne AS

Farnham Astronomical Society

Farnham Astronomical Society was asked to hold an observing evening at Mytchet Primary School in November 2009. After discussions with the teachers it was decided to hold two daytime visits to the Aldershot Observatory as well as an

evening at the school itself. The observatory visits were well attended and much enjoyed by the children. We also had a good turn out for the observing evening with many helpers from the society, at least seven telescopes and an audience of maybe as many as sixty or seventy children and parents. As so often happens the night was cloudy but we had an alternative programme prepared and gave three short presentations on Astronomy.

Due to pressure of work Barry Bellinger decided to resign from the Committee; Barry has done an excellent job of representing the society and organising our programme of speakers – a job that he has done for a number of years (and more than the seven years that I have been a member).

The society held its AGM on 8th December 2009. Being a small society we have struggled in the past to fill vacancies on the committee with the result that a few of the committee members had to wear several hats. At the December AGM we were delighted to receive a fantastic response from members with volunteers filling four vacancies – including the recently vacated post of Secretary. Our line up is now as follows:

Chairman	John Price
Secretary	Danny Thomas
Treasurer	John Rees
Membership Secretary	Peter West
Programme Secretary Newsletter Editor	Kevin Pretorius
Librarian	Eric Grieve
Observing Co-ord	Steve Woodbridge
Webmaster and SAGAS representative	Peter Campbell-Burns

Our new website goes from strength to strength with some articles being submitted as well as the usual high quality images acquired by our members. A topical article on the December Blue Moon attracted over 1,300 visits in one week and the weekly statistics regularly show visitors from 40 to 50 countries. One of the benefits of the new technology is that committee members are now able to look after their own content rather than making the webmaster responsible for everything on the site.

We start 2010 with a strong committee – and many thanks are now in order. Our thanks must go to Barry Bellinger for the excellent support he has given us, to the four members who have stepped up to the mark and joined our Committee, and to Richard Kacerek and his company Empire Elements Ltd for donating expertise, time and resources to our new web site.

Peer Campbell-Burns, Webmaster Farnham AS

Foredown Tower Astronomers

On 25th October we rounded off Foredown Tower Astronomers' celebration of IYA 2009 with a talk by Mike Feist about '400 Years of the Telescope'. The talk was attended by more than 30 members of the public, bringing our total attendance for IYA public events to over 260.

We were invited to attend Manor Field Primary School's Science Day and Moon Watch on 21st November. Four members took along a model of the Solar System

and a selection of meteorites and micro-meteorites, as well as a large telescope and binoculars to explain how, to the school children and their parents, look at the night sky. They had successfully applied for funds which enabled them to fill the school with children's science activities. They had bought a small planetarium for continuing education & hired a large AstroDome for the day with subsidised demonstrations for all visitors. The classrooms were given to practical projects, making paper telescopes, paper rockets, paper sundials, edible planet biscuits, space gloves, paper shooting stars & colouring moon maps. There were also slide shows, models to see, shadow puppets & insights of relevant topics i.e. Dark Skies. FTA members set themselves up in a classroom, with the solar system model, telescope on display, binoculars, meteor rock display & micrometeorite display using a microscope. The event was very well attended with parents with younger children & pupils filling the school all day.

The previous Wed. Brian Johnston gave two illustrated talks at the school, to a full school hall which were well received by pupils & teachers. Bad weather on the day made the Moon Watch impossible, but three members returned for a very successful rescheduled Moon Watch on Friday, November 27th, between 4.00 and 6.00 pm. They were going to have a IYA Dark Skies Awareness Star Count on 4 Dec.2009. The Burgess Hill site on IYA 2009.

The FTA met on the 3rd Thursday of December for our final meeting of 2009. We started with our business meeting and then had a quiz that showed the constellation without the joining dots, We had great fun working them out, some of them so easy and others not quite so easy. How the dots make it easy for us all!!.

We then finished the evening in festive mood with festive food, the evening had become too cold to take the telescopes outside and look at the night sky. We left wishing each other Clear Skies for the Christmas season. As we left the snow was beginning to fall and settle.

One of our members has been working on the FTA website, which is proving an excellent way for many of us to keep in touch between meetings and share observations and images.

The FTA plans are to work with the new group running the Tower & continue monthly meetings. At the time of writing this we are still awaiting a conclusion.

David Inman, FTA

Guildford Astronomical Society

Paid-up membership currently stands at 111, which is excellent. In common with many organisations we were hit by the adverse weather and had to cancel our January meeting', so "Latest Results from Cassini" by Prof Andrew Coates will be rescheduled.

There have been two very significant events for us since October, and they are linked. Firstly we have decided to construct a separate imaging facility at our observatory in the grounds of MSSL. This will leave our 20.5" Newtonian for purely visual purposes. We have purchased an EQ6 Pro plus a permanent pier on which we will be mounting our Williams Optics Megrez plus Starlight Express CCD. The other news is that has been that we have received an educational grant toward this project from local telescope supplier *Astronomia* in Dorking, whereby

they have agreed to fund the roll-off roof shed for the imaging set-up. We are delighted by both these developments.

After a slowish start our new Bulletin Board has increased dramatically in usage, attracting 56 of our members to access it. There have been 177 posts and 81 topics. Our webmaster now manages a central GAS members database and this facilitates our new webmail system, whereby any member can email any other member just by knowing their name - very useful.

Our Projects Group continues its imaging observations of Epsilon Aurigae.

We will be repeating our basic training for members, starting this month, on a once per month basis, running until April. We shall also be conducting two training sessions on image processing.

Our Xmas Dinner will be held next week.

As IYA drew to a close, our outreach activities still continued apace. Our final "Tour Of The Night Sky" was held at Newlands Corner in November, attracting 25 scopes and 140 visitors. This event has proved such a success, that we plan to continue conducting similar events at the same venue, perhaps twice per year. We were flattered to be one of the two Astronomical Societies invited by the RAS to describe our outreach activities at their special IYA meeting held on 11th December.

During the last quarter we held nine of our normal outreach events for misc organisations etc, and have another three already booked for the next few months. One unusual event was sidewalk astronomy outside the Albert Hall, supporting an astronomical photographic exhibition on display inside.

John Axtell, Secretary Guildford AS

Southdowns Astronomical Society

The Society meets in the Main Hall of the High School for Boys in Chichester on the first Friday of each Month. The Meetings commence at 7.30pm. There are two short talks by members of about 10 to 15 minutes, one being "whats-up" in the sky for the forthcoming months.

The Society has had a reasonably successful year. About 35 attend the Meetings; the Membership during the year has fallen from 115 members to 109. We are still however attracting new members.

We have had a selection of Speakers on various topics throughout the year, some from the Society and some from Universities and other Astronomical Societies and Professional Bodies.

This year's Speakers were as follows:-

January	Storm Dunlop	"Astronomical Optics 2"
February	Due to the snow James Fradgely was unable to attend	so John Whittington gave a talk on the "History of Gravity".
March	Dr David Bacon	"Cosmic Mirages"
April	Unfortunately Neil Bone was very ill and Bob Turner	kindly gave a talk on "Hubble" at very short notice.

May	James Fradgely	"Orbital Oddities"
June	Annie Mills and Peter Gill	"Thomas Harriot" "The Sun"
July	Ron Arbour	"Desperately seeking Supernova"
September	Bob Mizon	"The Tunguska Event and an update on The Campaign for Dark skies"
October	Prof Nichol	"Galaxy Zoo"
November	Prof Malcolm Coe	"Magellanic Clouds"
December	Dr Peter Ford	"Michael Faraday and the liquid nitrogen show"
January	AGM	Cancelled due to snow.

Forthcoming Dates

5 February	AGM and Robin Gorman	"Why Pluto had to go!"
5 March	Dr Chris Lintott and Dr Lucy Rogers	"Carl Sagan – Life in the Universe" "It's only Rocket Science"

As the April Meeting falls on Good Friday this has been brought forward a week to 26th March. Pete Lawrence "TBA"

7 May	Prof Ian Morison	"TBA"
4 June	Dr. Stuart Eves	"Sophisticated small satellite from Surrey"
2 July	Douglas Denny	"Astro navigation and practical evening solar observing"

We have hoped to have observing sessions during the break up until now, but the weather condition has not been conducive.

Next year's AGM will be on 10th January 2011

John Worthington, Secretary Southdowns AS

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

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

November Phil Berry gives a presentation on "Iridium Flares"

November 27th We held a Moonwatch at Phil Berry's observatory for Sparrows Green local residents and Astronomy GCSE students from the Uplands Community College. This was 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. Plenty of hot beverages and soup & bread was available to keep out the cold.

December A member, Paul Treadaway gave a talk about the 200 mm telescope he is making in celebration of the IYA2009.

January 2010 Our AGM and after a member Jan Drozd talks on his astronomical models.

Changed Format

We have changed the format of our meetings to include a main speaker then a free coffee break followed by a presentation on a topic of basic practical astronomy followed by the "Sky this Month".

The changes were made in order to attract more members. We have also surveyed all members to check what they want from meetings and the feedback has confirmed the changes are appreciated.

Phil BerryEvents Organiser Wadhurst AS.

Wealden Astronomical Society

Society members have been very busy this year at the Observatory Science Centre manning various positions within the grounds and domes, showing members of the public the telescopes and explaining the night sky when weather permitted.

There has been a lot more viewing evenings due to 2009 being the year of Astronomy. We were out in force for a Geminid viewing evening in December and fortunately it cleared for a while and some members of the public saw one or two Geminids.

We held our Annual Christmas meal on the first Friday in December at the Bull Inn in St.Leonards. A very successful event all round with 20 society members present and four staff from the Science Centre. Our annual raffle raised some funds for the society coffers so the Treasurer Steve was happy.

The Chairman, Chris Ellis received a call in November from a property owner in Burwash who had with his recently purchased bungalow, an observatory complete with telescopes and an optical workshop. Two of us went to view the site in late November and were greeted by the owner who showed us the large workshop with a nine foot dome on one end of the building. The dome contained a 12 inch Cassegrain on a fork mount. Further up the garden was a smaller run off shed with a 16 inch Gregorian Reflector on an English Mount.

The new owner was anxious to dispose of anything astronomical and so we arranged a trip in December to recover what was feasible with limited time and transport. We ended up with the 12 inch Reflector, the 16 inch mirror and cell, a coated 22 inch mirror plus a Cassegrainian Secondary mirror and some ancillary bits of drive machinery. All are now in store for evaluation as to their eventual fate.

The societies two telescopes see a fair bit of use, one of our London members looks after the 12 inch Dobsonian and brings it to the Centre for viewing evenings. The PST H alpha telescope is in the hands of one of our Hailsham members who is learning a lot about the Sun by the use of this small but handy instrument.

For our first meeting of the new year in February we have as our guest speaker Stuart Constable from the Radio club. He will do a talk on aspects of Radio Astronomy, an interesting diversion from the usual optical side of astronomy. The Wealden Societies AGM is in April when the committee will be voted on for the forthcoming year, there are no changes or additions at the moment though the group does have a vacancy for a secretary.

Chris Ellis - Chairman.

Worthing Astronomers

For the finale to IYA Worthing Astronomers chose to hold a two week exhibition in the local library (pictured above). This created a great deal of interest, including from the library staff, and an increase in membership.

Just prior to this, WA had held their final public observing week on the seafront to coincide with Moonwatch week. Weather at the start of the week was in favour of looking at the night sky, but mid-week it deteriorated and brought about an early end to the proceedings.

The night-club at the end of Worthing Pier had produced some rather bright laser beams which reached as far as Steyning, however some complaints to the local council brought attention that the night-club owner had not obtained planning permission and the problem was sorted.

During November 2009 it was intended to hold some Back-to-Basics observing evenings for learning the constellations and how to draw the Moon. Unfortunately the poor weather during that month put paid to that and it is intended to try again before the end of January 2010, if this time it is not cancelled because of snow!

During December two members joined B&HA for their Christmas get-together.

The last event of 2009 was a meeting to celebrate the return of the Sun to the northern hemisphere (solstice, but on the 23rd) and like almost everyone else in the SAGAS group, the January informal meeting was cancelled due to heavy snow and icy conditions.

At the end of January, there is another seafront Observing Weekend planned, on the last Friday and Saturday of the month, making Mars and the Moon the objects of interest to show to the public.

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John Axtell
SAGAS Secretary
14th January 2010