

SAGAS

Southern Area Group of Astronomical Societies

Minutes of meeting 8th October 2011 South Downs Planetarium, Chichester

- **Societies in attendance**

astronomy4everyone

Cody AS

Crawley AS

Croydon AS

Eastbourne AS

Farnham AS

Foredown Tower

Astronomers

Guildford AS

Newbury AS

Hampshire AG

Hantsastro

Newbury AS

Wessex AS

Worthing Astronomers

- **Welcome & apologies**

Apologies: Vectis AS; Horsham AS; Wadhurst AS

Keith Brackenborough who was due to chair the meeting declared he had urgent business elsewhere later in the afternoon and Graham Bryant (Hampshire Astronomical Group) kindly took the chair for the meeting.

- **Minutes of last meeting**

Firstly the Chairman asked those voting representative AS's to introduce themselves. The Chairman then asked that all present Astronomical Societies to add their contact details to the sheet in the foyer as there had been confusion as to where the minutes should be sent.

There was some confusion as to whether the AGM minutes were to be discussed and the Chairman assured the questioner that this discussion was of the last SAGAS meeting only - AGM minutes would be discussed at the next AGM in April.

The minutes were the point of much discussion as it was felt by some that they did not reflect what took place at the last meeting as there was no reference to the discussion about emails raised at that meeting.

It was understood that the previous meeting did discuss an issue concerning emails and that this should be added to the minutes however Tony Questa (SAGAS Treasurer) reminded this meeting that the minute-taker Jan Young (Worthing) had correctly carried out the agreement of the previous meeting: that the discussion would be recorded sensitively.

The reasons for writing the minutes in this way were then accepted.

The Chairman then asked for a vote of acceptance from the floor for the amendment and acceptance. 9 in favour and 1 abstention: Minutes accepted.

A discussion took place on the issue of offensive emails and later of A4E's membership. Minutes of these discussions are recorded separately and will be made available to representatives of SAGAS Member societies.

Membership

The Chairman then congratulated astronomy4everyone (A4E) as new members.

Keith Brackenborough (SAGAS rep to FAS) was then invited to take the floor where he informed the meeting that FAS was looking at the whole issue re societies joining FAS and as a consequence whether they could take advantage of the PLI insurance.

There was a discussion of web-based societies - the general consensus was that SAGAS should include eg web-based societies. Peter Campbell-Burns (SAGAS webmaster) said that 'traditional' societies and web-based societies should complement each other within SAGAS – also an opinion with general approval.

This and SAGAS' relationship with FAS should be discussed and a conclusion sought at the next AGM.

Society reports

There followed an enthusiastic and amicable disclosure from many AS's that they were indeed quite busy in pursuit of all things astronomical.

The following reports had been received in advance of the meeting.

Wessex AS

In the last quarter our monthly meetings have been a talk by Graham Bryant on 'Observing Meteoroid Impactors on the Moon' – a well illustrated and fascinating topic; Jerry Workman who talked about the Mars Rovers in his usual inimitable style; and thirdly a talk by Bob Mizon who substituted for a cancelled visit by talking around many different 'Astronomy Pictures of the Day' (APODs).

Wessex AS also operates the observatory it established in 2008 at Durlston Country Park near Swanage. This is done in conjunction with the staff of the Country Park when public and private events are held. In the first 9 months of the year the observatory has been used on 42 occasions of which nine were public events with visitor numbers ranging from the mid twenties to about 130 on one occasion. Eight occasions involved visitors such as school groups, clubs, friends, support for an Astronomy course etc.

At the end of September there was some interference with observing caused by a number of moth enthusiasts using very bright lights to trap moths at various places within the Park, which is apparently an excellent location for this activity at times. A reasonable compromise between the potentially conflicting activities was achieved after a number of the moth enthusiasts were invited into the observatory to observe the Andromeda Galaxy, the Hercules Cluster and Jupiter.

A new type of activity was tried this year by arranging a "Solar Day" on two occasions. Unfortunately one was cancelled due to cloud and rain and the other was only partially successful due to the Sun being somewhat elusive. We hope for better luck next year.

Farnham Astronomical Society

We have worked hard to grow the membership and have been rewarded with membership reaching the mid-60s (from dismal low thirties at the end of 2010). Seating capacity in our meeting hall is becoming an issue. Although helped by national publicity around Stargazing Live, local publicity has been one of the main drivers behind this growth. Danny Thomas' good relationships with local press continues to give us excellent coverage. We also had displays at Frensham Fayre and Fleet Carnival.

The new membership is generating more interest in observing as a group and Chris Thayer organised a very successful session in Frensham at the end of September. Kevin Pretorius has reorganised our speaker calendar to make the sessions immediately after Stargazing Live 2012 more practical and beginner friendly.

Our offer to the Aldershot and Farnham Camera Club to visit them and present on astrophotography was very well received. Peter Campbell-Burns gave a talk on deep sky astrophotography and Danny Thomas talked about widefield astrophotography. The programme lasted over two hours. At the end of the meeting we set them a photographic challenge: to send us their own widefield images. A prize awaits the photographer who sends in the image which our members vote to be the best.

The website continues to serve us very well, generating enquiries for membership and getting the message out there. At one point a Google search on ptfk11y returned Chris Thayer's image as #1 in the search engine rankings. It currently sits at #3. We even had an enquiry via the site from a book publisher asking to use one of John Moore's Venus transit images for a book cover. Though shortlisted, it was not used in the end.

The Cody and Farnham Astronomical Societies are to make a joint approach to a small astronomy group based in Meudon (Paris), which is twinned with Rushmore, with a view to establishing friendly links.

Hampshire Astronomical Group

Recent AGM and there was a small change of members on the committee. Contact details remain the same and can be found on the Group's website.

Membership remains stable at around 180. The Group is now using Drop-box for important document storage. This became evident following the death of our membership and open evening bookings secretary, Jack Climpson. Details can be given to any other society who would like information on how we use this system.

Links with the University of Portsmouth remain good, with all the students who had a final year astronomy project graduating in July 2011 with a BSc in Mathematics.

The Group has just ordered a portable solar telescope with a double stack solar Hydrogen Alpha filter, cost in excess of £5000. This was partly funded by the University of Portsmouth.

The Group has completed the internal refurbishment of the 5 inch dome to a more period Victorian feel in keeping with the Cooke and Smith Beck & Beck double refractor.

Guildford AS

We held our AGM in July with several of the old Committee deciding to take a well earned rest. There is now a new Committee in place with new President, Secretary and Treasurer, though all of the incumbents had held previous posts, thus providing much-needed continuity. Three new members have been elected to the Committee.

We have an excellent lecture programme for the forthcoming year, the highlight is perhaps securing Professor Jim Al-Khalili for our December talk.

GAS is delighted to announce a major achievement for an amateur astronomical society - we have detected the light-signature of an Exoplanet! This was just two weeks ago and was done by photometry. Over 400 images were taken over a period of 4 hours and the miniscule drop in magnitude was accurately recorded and coincided exactly with the predicted times of the planet's transit. Two reference stars within the same field of view showed no such drop. The data is currently with the Exoplanet monitoring authority for independent confirmation. This is only the 2nd time this has been done by an AS. The 1st time was fellow SAGAS colleagues Hampshire AG, and we would like to thank them for their encouragement and advice, all done in true SAGAS spirit. Though we cannot match their claim to be the 1st AS to do this, we can at least claim to be the 1st to do it entirely by ourselves, and with just a small 80mm refractor too! ...

GAS is continuing its series of large public outreach events at Newlands Corner. The next is on Saturday 3rd December, and we would like to invite nearby societies to join us.

Jan Young (Worthing Astronomers) then offered a service of producing tee-shirts with AS's own logos, designs etc. Jan kindly proposed to produce the tee-shirts for SAGAS member societies 'at cost'. She showed us examples of her work to date and the meeting was impressed with the end-product look and feel and thanked Jan for her offer.

Phil Alner (Cody AS) observed that SAGAS was indeed the vehicle for S-E astronomy societies to exchange ideas and views.

The Chairman then spoke about the need to have Groups' important details and archive material to be available in the event of a member-group representative becoming unavailable. The chairman stated that HAG used a system called DROP BOX (introduced after the death of an important member of HAG's committee).

Report on Summer Meeting at Horsham & next year's summer event

The Chairman thanked Horsham AS for a super SAGAS summer event in the fantastic surroundings of Christs Hospital School in Horsham. There was good representation by SAGAS societies and this was all arranged quite late so extra thanks to Horsham for stepping into the breach. There were many echoing comments from the floor and the meeting showed its appreciation with applause.

The Chairman asked for volunteers re next summer's 2012 SAGAS meeting, Southdown AS did offer their services and the venue would likely be at the South Downs Planetarium. Thanks were given to Southdowns AS for this offer.

SAGAS Website

The website was then discussed and the floor given to Peter Campbell-Burns (Farnham AS). In summary Peter stated his view of the purpose and function of the SAGAS website and of websites generally. Furthermore Peter suggested that members used the website a lot more for broadcasting their own AS's news.

Peter went on to suggest that we encourage all member societies reps to send a report to SAGAS stating what they wanted from their membership of SAGAS. This idea was welcomed and reps present indicated their willingness to follow this up.

A warm welcome was proposed from the floor for Peter's offer of being the new webmaster with a unanimous approval.

Speakers List

The speakers list was then discussed by Phil Alner (Cody AS) and there was discussion as to what information was relevant for publication by members regarding speaker details in the public domain. Many constructive views were aired and a conclusion was deferred to a later meeting.

FAS Convention

The Chairman then reminded the meeting of the date and time (15th October 2011) of the next FAS meeting at the Institute of Astronomy.

There being no further business the attendees had a coffee break.

_____ Coffee Break _____

After the break Graham Bryant (HAG) gave the presentation

Hampshire Astronomical Group & Astronomy Projects with University of Portsmouth

Graham then led a question-and-answer and a lively discussion on related subjects.

As a large proportion of representatives and members carried on the discussion the meeting ended quite late.