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Issue 40

FEDERATION OF ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETIES

EDITORIAL

Well the AGM is almost upon us, at least it seems so to me, although I know that it is still over two months away. However this issue is concerned mainly with the AGM with Officers reports, Council nominations and other FAS business but I have included as many Society reports as possible and a couple of Book Reviews.

At the last Council meeting a suggestion came from the Chair that the Newsletter should maybe increase in size to six pages and I would be delighted since it would allow me to introduce articles into the Newsletter from Society magazines which contain some really wonderful material. Anyway I have to do a little work on costs but I think that from the next issue we will have a little more room. Heavenly Bodies is good if late!! We can reach via Strabase4.

Hope to see lots of you at Kettering Clear Skies.

Ken Sheldon

OFFICER'S REPORTS 1994/95

PRESIDENT

I have now completed my first year as President, and I am very pleased at the way the Federation is working. One of my aims on becoming President was to raise the profile of the FAS. I found, on joining the Council, that the Federation does a great deal for astronomical societies and astronomy in general, but the members of Council seem to have a reticence about telling people of their hard work.

One result of the FAS being a bit more noticeable is that I have been approached by various organisations on various astronomical topics. This can only be for the good, as a voice speaking on behalf of the astronomical societies of the country should be heard.

The Federation also tries to work closely with other national astronomical bodies in the country and we have forged close links with the AAE (Association for Astronomy Education) and the SPA (Society for Popular Astronomy). We have also begun a dialogue of cooperation

with the RAS (the Royal Astronomical Society), from which organisation individuals have always been very supportive of the FAS. I hope we can work closely together in the future for the mutual benefit of astronomy.

I will not go into all the individual projects with which the Federation has become involved, the Council member concerned will tell you about them in their own reports. Instead, I would like to thank all the Council members for their hard work and enthusiasm. We have a good team working on your behalf and we always welcome any suggestions as to other ways we can aid your local society.

Pam Spence

SECRETARY

Throughout the year I have attended Council Meetings and taken Minutes and have tried to keep in touch with other Council members between meetings. I have used the Newsletter to pass information to Society members. There have been requests for help with

F.A.S. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Montague School Kettering

1995 Saturday 6th May

Doors Open 9.00 a.m.

AGM starts 10.00 a.m.

Speakers

12.00 Jerry Workman

KADAS

"The Voyager Missions"

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Rob Forrest

Univ of Herts

"Astrophotography vs CCD Imaging"

15.45 Dr Janet Drew

Univ of Keele

"Cataclysmic Variables"

16.45

The Ken Marcus Memorial Lecture

"Astronomy from Space"

Prof. Ken Pounds FRS

17.45 Concluding Remarks by Pam Spence (President FAS)

Tea/Coffee Breaks 11.30 and 15.15

Tickets £4 each from Alan Drummond.

Persuade your Secretary to book for the Society. Societies sending 6 or more members receive free membership of the Federation (but not free insurance) if the tickets places are booked in advance.

This mailing contains a map which your Secretary has. On booking you will also receive a map. There is adequate parking - there will be on site catering but there are also pubs in the area.

Kettering & District AS have organised a pay minibus shuttle service from Kettering Station.

IF YOU WANT A SOCIETY EXHIBIT CONTACT MIKE INGLIS ON 01772 422265

Don't forget Neil Bone would like your Society News for AN.

If you sent me a newsletter but haven't got a write-up please don't be offended - I will make up for it when we are give a bit more area! Ken

AYLESBURY AS AAS have a new acting Secretary since Nigel Sheridan has been posted to Suffolk. I hope he took the Orwell contact address. Apart from that the AAS are getting on with observing (when possible) and having good speakers Contact Peter Biswell on 01296 85125 for programme.

BEDFORD AS The AGM has just happened and I trust that my contact is still correct in being Peter Cox on 01234 354552 for Society info and an up-to-date programme of events.

One thing that caught my eye on reading the BAS Newsletter for January was the article by Kevin Earp on log keeping - this is certainly an area where I am deficient and his points are good and well made.

BIRMINGHAM AS I had a 1-o-n-g report from BAS and will publish in the next issue but the gist is that BAS are very, very active with ordinary meetings, observing sessions and workshops. Contact is Andy Salmon on 0121 565 4845

BRIDGEND AS Another BAS is also very active, I gave a talk there a few weeks ago and was very impressed with the keen audience and their obvious enthusiasm for Astronomy. They also seem to have a regular stream of good outside speakers plus their own efforts. Contact Clive Down on 01656 740754 for details of meetings which take place on alternate Fridays.

CAMBRIDGE AA and CAMBRIDGE YA Contact Dr Frank Murphy at 98 High St, Harton, Cambridge CB3 7ES or on 01223 262421 for membership and programme info.

COTSWOLD AS Contact Irene Hatton on 01242 673923 or John Daniel on 0453 757026 for more details of the programme.

CRAYFORD MANOR AS Visitors are always welcome and should contact Roger Pickard on 01723 850663.

LA SOCIÉTÉ GUERNESIAISE ASTRONOMY SECTION AS usual La Societe have had a full winter session and lots seem to have happened. If you are going to Guernsey on holiday you should contact Geoff Falla the Hon. Secretary on Guernsey 724101 for details of the Spring and Summer programme..

HAG The person to contact for details is Roy Dodd on 01705 646875

AS of HARINGEY The newsletter 2002 has the best reproduction of pictures of any that I receive. The October edition had some pictures of an exhibit which were photographic in their quality. The Society has a good 94/95 programme with Dr Allan Chapman, Dr Mike Leggett, Konrad Malin-Smith, Dr Derek McNally plus many of the local speakers. Contact Jerry Workman on 0171 607 7751 for more details.

HIGHLAND AS The Highland AS has been meeting monthly in the Spectrum Centre in Inverness for two years now. A loyal nucleus has been built up and other people are becoming interested, many of whom travel great distances

to attend. We have recently obtained permission to use the National Trust car park at Culloden as an observing site. In our situation the Aurora is a major interest and members on the Moray coast are well placed so we have many good observations and photographs. We are, however, short of speakers. Any speakers coming this way on holiday please contact us as we meet throughout the summer on the 2nd Tuesday of each month and would be happy to offer hospitality.

Write or phone J.F.Dick, 8 Holm Park, Inverness, IV2 4XT. Tel/Fax 01463 224036

J.F.Dick

IRISH AS If you are going to Eire for a holiday look at the IAS they seem to have some excellent meetings. Contact James Lynch on 820 2135 (dialling code is 010 353 1 I think) for information on meetings and publications.

ISLE OF MAN AS Mr Martin reports that the Society is growing well - there have been 7 new members recently. Publicity is through a programme on Manx radio. They hold public observing sessions, which are always well attended, at a site on the west of the island where it is very dark. There is a cafe so that they can put up displays and have talks etc if it is raining. They are planning an observing session soon on top of Snaefell at the height of 2,000 ft. Access is by the Manx railway - a narrow gauge track, and they hope to involve railway enthusiasts as well. Should be a good one.

Enquiries to J.W.Martin Tel: 01624 842954

LETCHEWORTH & District AS I was taken aback when I looked at the January newsletter and counted the scheduled events for February and March - 11, yes eleven. OK so it included two committee meetings but it still means 9 events some of which were public observing sessions the Standalone Observatory. Speakers have included Dr Mark Jones and Jaqueline Mitton. I did like the report on the talk and demo of film processing, I don't understand why people are so frightened of it! Contact Eric Hutton on 01462 431988 for further details of meetings.

LEICESTER AS Talk to Ann Bonell on 0116 239 4481 for details of programme. Excellent talks last autumn by Nobel prize winner Prof Anthony Hewish on '27 years of Pulsars' (with good support from other Societies in the area) and on Active Galaxies by LAS member Anthony Holloway - doing a PhD on these at Manchester.

The annual Inter-Society Christmas Social was held at Hinckley in December. This year it took the form of a 'Call My Bluff' evening with Leicester, Hinckley, Heart of England and Wolverhampton. Unfortunately, LAS's winning streak appears to be over as they lost to HOEAS (I can say they as I was on the panel!). But we will be back next year in fighting form! The Annual dinner will be on Feb 11th. A trip to France with Newbury AS is planned for May. Programme includes 'The Missing Constellations' by Mike Gainsford, 'Captain Cook & transit of Venus' by Malcolm Astley and 'The Leonids at the end of the Century' by

LIVERPOOL AS On Saturday, November 26th, 35 society members, family and friends travelled to Bradford for a visit to the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. The Museum is a joint venture between the Science Museum (London) and the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, consisting of six floors, exploring the history, art and science of photography, film and television. The first floor contained the Kodak Museum with the world's largest lens, the story of the pinhole camera, and a special exhibition telling the story of the Apollo 11 Moon landing. The spotlight gallery had a live theatre show called 'Destiny in Space', which was a series of small plays telling the story of man's fascination with the Moon.

But the highlight of the day had to be the new IMAX film 'Destiny in Space', shown on Britain's largest cinema screen, 5 stories, 53 feet high and 63 feet wide. This all new NASA film, which explored our Solar System, and showed how Man can live and work in space, also showed breathtaking views of a Shuttle launch, the Hubble Space Telescope repair mission, and a computer fly around of Venus.

The question was asked - could Mars become an Earth-type planet, with Man's help, in the next 100 years?

I think everyone who went on the trip had a great time, I certainly did and there are plans to go again next March/April. Thanks to all who supported the trip and to the car drivers who provided the transport.

Gerard Gilligan

Contact Ken Clark at 31 Sandymount Drive, Wallasey, L45 0LJ with an SAE for more details of the LAS programme

MANCHESTER AS In December a large attendance heard Dr T Naylor from Keele University talking on 'Black Holes and The Amateur Astronomer' a review of his team's CCD work. Feb meeting is Prof John Meaburn of Manchester U on 'Jets Everywhere' On 16th March Dr David Hughes of Sheffield U is looking at SL9. In July Dr Allan Chapman will star in 'Robert Hooke' during the MAS 1995 Astroday Convention. MAS have a Home Page on WWW. For more contact Mike Oates on e-mail: mike@phelectro.win-uk.net or on Compuserve>>mike@Compuserve1002553300. For details of the regular Thursday meetings at UMIST contact J Davidson on 0161 2004977.

John Davidson

NORWICH AS Seething continues to develop with lots of really exciting things just on the horizon including an initiative which will make most amateur astronomers green with envy especially if they have some interest in either Radio Astronomy or Amateur Radio Contact Malcolm Jones on 01508 578392 for more details.

ORWELL AS OAS seems to be one of the societies where most of the members are involved. Looking at the list of jobs and activities that take place makes you realise how many people are beavering away at amateur astronomy. Contact Peter Richards on 01473 644828

SCOTTISH ASTRONOMERS GROUP (SAG) There has been a bit of a reorganisation

adding up new Societies as a result of which some have joined the FAS. I have sent application forms to those who asked about the FAS Insurance which has also brought in new members. The number of queries about nearest societies seems to have increased and if the people who enquired have followed up my information many societies should have benefited. I have directed Teachers who have asked for help with information for teaching to the AAE, and to the nearest society for help in the classroom. Children have asked for help with projects and I have told them how to set about finding information as well as giving them some help myself.

Starting Astronomy and buying a telescope are other subjects which I am asked to advise on fairly regularly and I send a handout and give the address of the nearest society.

Bob Owens, who writes the Astrocalendar, has obtained ISBN numbers for the Astrocalendar and the Handbook, so both should be more widely mentioned in directories with the hope of increased sales.

I enjoy all these little challenges and hope that my help is useful and occasionally I have received a letter of thanks which is satisfying. I am willing to continue as Secretary. A volunteer has come forward to be Assistant Secretary and he will be responsible for Minutes.

Christine Sheldon

CONVENTIONS ORGANISER

The Cambridge convention was a great success, with lots of positive feedback, and helpful suggestions for next year.

The A.G.M. at Kettering is coming along quite nicely. All the speakers have been booked. With two amateur and two professional astronomers. We have been fortunate to get Professor Ken Pounds FRS, to give the Ken Marcus Memorial Lecture. Prof. Pounds is currently the Chairman of PPARC, and is thus possibly the most knowledgeable (and most influential?) on the current, and future state of astronomy in Britain. It is also worth noting that Prof. Pounds was very pleased to be asked to give a lecture.

It is a bit early to talk of the 1995 Cambridge convention, however there are plans to make it quite a good event (as usual).

Dr Mike Inglis

**RAS/FAS Project
At the last FAS
Council meeting the
RAS representative
Dr Margaret Penston
suggested that FAS
Societies might like to
get involved in a sky
brightness monitoring
scheme that the RAS is
intending to set up.
WATCH THIS SPACE**

EDUCATION SECRETARY

Over the last year, the usual number of enquiries about astronomy courses have been received. Many of these enquiries are concerned with schools and societies - the enquirer has been put in touch with his local society.

It was thought that a Directory of Institutions putting on Astronomy courses (and also those where they have been put on in the past) would prove useful. To this end, we put a notice in the last FAS Newsletter, calling for information about such courses. It was hoped that a nationwide Directory could be established.

We have so far received a very small number of replies. Past experience has shown that this was only to be expected - such is the fate of questionnaires. May we ask our regional representatives to help us with local activities?

Ideally we could write to every local authority in the land, but for obvious reasons this is impracticable. Of course, for example we are in touch with the WEA.

The project has the blessing of the AAE, who are happy to make their contribution.

To turn to another matter, the FAS has been represented on the **National Astronomy Week '96 Committee**. This event may seem a long way off (September 21st 1996), but the committee has already met several times. We hope that as many participants as possible will involve themselves in the Week, which is calculated to bring Astronomy to the attention of the lay public. The NAW committee does not wish to dictate to societies how to put on the event, such societies being independent. But the NAW committee will be happy to give guidance and, very shortly, regular newsletters will be made available.

I have given the editor copies of the NAW's preliminary thoughts on the matter. The first of a regular series of NAW Newsletters is due to be published a little too late for inclusion in this current FAS Newsletter: this information will appear in the next issue.

The Education Secretary has been helped by the appointment (at last year's AGM) of an Assistant Education Secretary, Dr Mike Inglis. Mike also sits as an FAS representative on the AAE Council.

Eric Zucker

ASSISTANT EDUCATION SECRETARY

The Education Section of the FAS has had quite a busy year. Along with the usual requests from the public, schools, etc., for details on Societies, there has been a slow, but steady flow of information, in response to our request for details of Astronomy courses throughout Britain. This information will be collated into a substantial guide to places in the U.K. which currently holding courses on Astronomy or have done so in the past. This information will eventually be placed in the FAS Handbook.

In addition, the FAS was asked to provide a list of speakers who would be willing to visit schools and talk to children. This list is substantially different to the list of speakers in the Handbook, for the simple reason that these visits will usually have to take place during the day. The audience is also different to that found in a Society. A provisional list was drawn up, and a request sent to all the regional reps, for volunteers to come forward. The provisional list has been sent out, with a note indicating that a more

socially aware list would be sent to the AAE council meetings, where the FAS was able to make a strong contribution.

I would like to thank Eric Zucker, the other half of the education secretariat. I came into this as a complete novice, and Eric has given me advice and help throughout the past year. Thanks Eric!

Finally, a strong letter of protest was written, on behalf of the education secretariat, to the producers of "Blue Peter", on their competition to light up buildings!

Dr Mike Inglis

EDITOR

The year always seems to disappear quickly and I have only produced 4 newsletters and the Handbook plus several flyers to Societies. The Handbook involved sending a letter to all non-federated societies. This year if they did not reply I have put them into a separate section saying that they were unconfirmed since we cannot even assume that they still exist. I hope that this might help with returns.

I am endeavoring to give coverage to all Societies and welcome news from Societies but do have to edit when I receive 400 words from one Society.

We are discussing the possibility of a regular offprint facility for articles from the Handbook over the past 20 years which might be of interest or possibly a compilation of the best articles from the last 20 years. I think it is a good idea.

I am prepared to continue in the post if the Council and the Societies wish me to.

Ken Sheldon

NOMINATIONS TO COUNCIL

The following persons have been proposed by the Council of the FAS for 1995-96

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| President | Pam Spence Worthing AS |
| Vice President | Tony Balfour Aylesbury AS |
| Secretary | Christine Sheldon Worcester AS |
| Treasurer | Graham Bowden-Peters Docklands AS |
| Asst Secretary | Mike Hurrell South Bayfordbury AS |
| Conventions | Mike Inglis South Bayfordbury AS |
| Council Newsletter | Klan Drummond Crawley AS |
| Editor | Ken Sheldon Worcester AS |
| Education Membership Publications | Mike Inglis Ken Sheldon Malcolm Jones Norwich AS |
| Publicity | Clive Down Bridgend AS |

This list is only our recommendation and does not prevent the nomination of other persons. If you wish to nominate someone, please make sure the person is proposed and seconded and has agreed to do the job.

SAG with a new President, Alistair Simmons, a new Vice-President Brian Kelly and a new Secretary Ken Mackay. The Newsletter contains some fascinating stuff, certainly it is a real source of material for discussion at open meetings and for use in society quizzes. I was looking forward to part two of the article on Spherical Geometry but it wasn't there! Still it is something to look forward to! Contact Ken Mackay at Hayford House, Cambusbarron, Stirling FK7 9PR for more details of programme.

SALFORD AS Contact Kath Redford on 0161 794 3179 for Society news. Following the reappearance of Jupiter after conjunction and reports of a new belt (the aftermath of SL9 impacts), Member Cliff Meredith's observations indicate some well defined markings of individual or small group impacts within the new belt and a conspicuous dark elongated feature which appears to correspond with major impact G Comet Borely has been observed both visually and with a CCD. The image displayed a tail and an antitail. The 95 Spring coach outing will be to Woolsthorpe Manor, birthplace of Isaac Newton and then to Lincoln AS Observatory. Visiting into Lincoln later. Members of other Societies are welcome.

Chris Marriott's SkyMap (Summer Newsletter had details) is now Version 2.2. Uses GSC for maps. Chris is on 01925 764131 or e-mail "chris@chrism.demon.co.uk" *Kath Redford*

SHROPSHIRE AS (Formerly the Shrewsbury & District AS) The 'new' SAS has had a fairly busy winter session with talks on 'Networking and BBS's from Peter Williamson SYSP of Starbase4. February has a talk on the development of a CCD imager by Simon Clayton-Jones who has been involved in the design and construction of a Planetary Imager and the March meeting has Paul Money with his Messier Marathon. There have been sundry observing sessions and talks by members. A good keen society. The contact is still David Woodward on 01743 872991

SOUTH EAST KENT AS Our astrophotography competition and Wine & Cheese Party went well in December. John Kemp was the eventual winner. January we had our Annual Dinner with over 20 members enjoying a well organised meal. In February we had our AGM. Our meeting list for 1995/96 is complete. Forthcoming meetings include a Quiz against Canterbury University, a lecture by Dr John Zarnecki on the Cassini Mission and a trip to Commander Hatfield to see his Spectroheliograph. We now have 3 meetings a month, two public observing evenings and the formal Society meeting. Contact Andrew McCarthy at 25 St Pauls Way, Folkestone, Kent CT20 3NT or on 01303 241933.

Andrew McCarthy
STRATFORD-U-AVON AS What a programme! The speakers from October 94 until October 95 are known and include names like Prof Peter Willmore (SUAS President), Paul Money, Andy Salmon, Robert Lewis, Chris Baddiley, Storm Dunlop, Prof Jocelyn Bell-Burnell and several other top astronomers. The Society have started planning for an observatory. Contact John Harrison on 01789 268775 for more information on the society.

SUNDERLAND AS Contact Don Simpson on 0191 5670151 for details. The planning for the Backhouse Observatory goes well, hopefully it will be on the land that Sunderland's astronomer left to the city. Public observing sessions have been very successful with 70 plus on the first night, all happy and promising to return. Lots of publicity on TV and the local press. The CIDS campaign is working, with the Council now installing full cut-off luminaires when changing and installing lights. Shame on Blue Peter!!!

Still looking for Backhouse books for my research. I'll buy. *Don Simpson*

WEST CORNWALL AS Having moved from Goonhilly Earth Station we are finding our new location much more accessible. We continue to meet on the third Thursday of each month at Helston Football Club. Each evening there is a Beginner's Talk followed by a Main Talk. We continue to publish our monthly newsletter. If you live in the far west they not come along and join in. Contact Robin Wadding on 0136 366981 for details of the coming programme of events.

WEST YORKS AS The WYAS Programme is now fixed and really has some gems. I found the puzzles in the December *Phobos* very demanding but really good fun. Contact Pete Lunn on 01924 360064 for programme of meetings.

BOOK REVIEWS

Heavenly Bodies: A Beginner's Guide to Astronomy by Iain Nicolson

Published by BBC Books, Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane, London, W12 0TT
Price: £9.99 ISBN: 0-563-37033-5

This book was written to accompany the BBC television series 'Heavenly Bodies'. The aim of the series was to bring astronomy to the person who knew nothing, or very little, and had perhaps been frightened off "science" at an early age. It was also targeted at children. The accompanying book is aimed at the same audience. In this respect they could do no better than ask Iain Nicolson to write the book. Iain has a fluent way of writing and a very clear and lucid way of explaining complex ideas.

The book may be based on the series, but it may be bought and read without having seen the television programmes. It follows the six episodes with six chapters covering each in turn. As a result it is an excellent introduction to basic ideas in astronomy. It is also well illustrated and is excellent value for money.

Pam Spence

Astronomy from Towns and Suburbs

Observers Handbook by Robin Scagell

Published by Philip's (Reed Consumer Books Ltd) Price £12.99 ISBN 0-540-05905-6

Written by an observer who knows what light pollution is about since he lives on the edge of London this book contains an immense amount of real common sense and useful information. Even just stressing how important clean optics are for the city/town based observer, shows that Robin is aware of the real difficulties experienced by the unfortunates who do live in the over-illuminated conurbations. The chapter headings were

interesting - Know your Enemy - Weather, and Streetlights, Choosing your Weapons, Targets and Ammunition (all very warlike) and if all else fails finishing with indoor astronomy and he isn't just talking about looking through the window.

Seriously though, (as an ex-city dweller) I found this book interesting, exciting and extremely informative. It is book you could just read but it is also interesting to browse through too. I was glad to see that CCD's and electronic astronomy got a mention since they seem to be the things that point the way to inner city astronomy. I liked it immensely and was glad of the opportunity to read it since as a country dweller would possibly not have bought it.

If you live in a town or suburb you should!!!!

Ken Sheldon

WHATS ON

March 11 William Herschel Society. 15th Herschel Lecture by Randi R Wesson, from JPL talking about the Cassini Mission.

April 3-7 National Astronomy Meeting A residential meeting at Cardiff University hosted by RAS and PPARC at UWCCardiff. Contact Dr Jon Davies, Dept of Physics & Astronomy, UWCC, PO Box 913, Cardiff, CF2 3YB

May 6 1995 FAS AGM & Convention at Montague School, Kettering. Run by Kettering and District AS. More details later. May 31 Bath AS/William Herschel Society host Jack Newton. Tickets £3 by SAE to RPS, The Octagon, Milsom St., BATH BA1 1DN

June 3 Worcester AS June 3 1995 Convention with Jack Newton.

July 29 Manchester AS ASTRODAY 1995 Sashes Home

Contact Mike Oates on mike@pnelectro.winuk.net or on Compuserve

>>mike@Compuserve100255,3300, or

J Davidson on 0161 2004977

July 29 Boston Astronomers "Eyes on the Universe III" Contact Lorraine Kendall on 01507 524037

September 30 FAS Autumn Convention Pippard Lecture Theatre, Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge

FAS May 1996 AGM & Convention at Liverpool AS. Details later.

N.A.W. 1996

If you haven't started to think about this please start now.

The week begins on 21st September 1996.

Publication dates. 1995

Summer late May Deadline 29th April

Autumn late August Deadline 31st July

Please try to get material to me in good time.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Council of the FAS.

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