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FEDERATION OF ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETIES

ISSUE 51

A TALE OF TWO CONVENTIONS

By Theresa Cooper (Cardiff AS)

AUTUMN CONVENTION AT CAMBRIDGE

The Autumn Convention was held on October 4th, once again at the picturesque and historic Cavendish Laboratories, Cambridge. Lectures were presented by Dr Steve Miller (UCL), Dr Roger Griffin (University of Cambridge), Dr Cathie Clarke (University of Leicester), Dr Peter Williams (Queen Mary and Westfield College) and Professor Colin Pillinger FRS (Open University).

The Eric Zuker award was presented to Rosemary Naylor for her services to astronomy over many years. Her attendance at the many conventions all over the country has been a consistent and very welcome feature.

All exhibitors who had indicated they would like to set up a trade stand attended for the day as promised. Delegates were able to browse around 14 exhibits between lectures and visits to the Royal Greenwich Observatory and

the Institute of Astronomy.

The attendance of approximately 200 delegates was down on last year but those who did attend enjoyed a varied and smoothly run day. Thank you to our speakers for giving of their time and also to members of Cambridge AS who proved to be reliable helpers.

SOUTH WALES SOCIETIES CONVENTION 1997

This inaugural event for the South Wales Societies took place on October 11th at the Techniquet Science Discovery Centre, Cardiff Bay.

Almost 200 delegates attended and were treated to 4 very entertaining and informative lectures from the Astronomer Royal Professor Sir Martin Rees, Dr Patrick Walters, Dr David Dunbar and Professor Mike Edmunds. Professor Rees travelled from Cambridge to present some of the latest findings of the fascinating research into black holes. Each lecture had a capacity audience with tickets

being much in demand. Delegates travelled from all over south and west Wales, the West Country, the Midlands and, in one case, Lancashire. Thank you to all the speakers for taking the time to lecture at the event making it a very enjoyable day.

The excellent science exhibits in Techniquet educated and entertained us all. Thanks must go to the staff there who were very helpful before and on the day itself, when they also had to cope with the usual busy weekend.

Finally this event was sponsored by British Steel and because of that we were able to offer free entry to the Convention. Thank you from the organisers and delegates for doing so, it was much appreciated.

If you would like information on any of the South Wales Societies (Swansea, Port Talbot, Bridgend, Cynon, Cardiff and Usk) please contact Theresa Cooper on 01446 700722 or email theresa@theresac.demon.co.uk

AstroFest '98 (Jan 30 - 31st 1998)

The F.A.S. has the free use of a room at AstroFest, as well as our usual stand. So if any society wishes to have a table in the society room, please could they contact Alan Dowdell. Note: tables will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Also, if any society wishes the F.A.S. stand to display or hand out details of their society, please send stuff to Alan, or arrange to have it delivered to the F.A.S. stand.

Contact Alan Dowdell at Uraniborg, Stoke, St. Mary Bourne, Andover, Hants SP11 0NB Tel: 01264 738619

E-mail: ARCEAD@HANTSNET.HANTS.GOV.UK

Pam Spence, President F.A.S.

New F.A.S. Web Site

The F.A.S. now has a new World Wide Web site on the Internet. The URL is <http://www.fedastro.demon.co.uk/>. The new site should mean that the pages can be laid out more logically, and the information kept up to date. Details about the Cambridge Convention, publications etc., will appear in appropriate sub-directories, with (I hope) a sensible naming scheme. The diary of meetings can now be found at www.fedastro.demon.co.uk/diary.html.

For those societies who do not have their own Web sites, we can display general information on your behalf. Send me the details that you would like to have on the Web, either electronically on a PC format 3.5 inch floppy disk, or as typewritten copy. Try to send me information that will remain reasonably static for some time, as it will not be possible to update it more often than every three or four months. My address is 15 Newham Lane, Steyning, West Sussex, BN44 3LR.

Please have a look at the new pages, and let me know of any corrections or improvements that could be made.

Thank you to everyone who sent in material for inclusion in the newsletter this issue. This is the way to be sure that you get the news you want. There are lots of ways but I obviously appreciate an e-mail or 3.5" PC format disk. If that is not possible post or fax it to me in good time please.

BULLETIN BOARD

The newsletter gives you an opportunity to access an enormous astronomy network. Are you wanting practical tips for a particular problem, information about a puzzling question, copies of a book or magazine, or to extend an invitation to a nearby society. Please send any requests or notices for the Bulletin Board. For ease you can always phone or e-mail them to me. (My details are at the top of the front page.)

OTHER IDEAS

Let's have your product reviews as well please; books, software, equipment. It is very useful to other astronomers to have personal feedback.

Remember societies always need suggestions too. Several newsletters comment on the problems of organising observing sessions. Send in your practical solutions for us all to use. Lots of societies have Christmas quizzes and, if they are anything like mine, a lot of time and effort is expended trying to come up with interesting and fun questions. How about pooling our resources by sending questions to me. I could then compile a database and send copies to societies on request.

I wish you all a Happy Christmas and hope to hear from lots of you in the new year!

Pam Gill

FAS ASTROCALENDAR 1998

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47 - 69	£5.80
70 - 93	£6.40
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117+	£8.55

AYLESBURY AS The AAS Bulletin is a very interesting and informative read. I especially like their quiz section and the article on the theoretical planet Vulcan that appeared in the September issue. AAS has again been encouraging and educating the local youngsters. For more information on AAS's activities contact Peter Biswell on 01296 85125 for the programme.

BRIDGEND AS As always I enjoyed the "Keeping Abreast" pages which Clive Down pulls together. They are a composite of summary news items from the month arranged under headings such as system or cosmology. Perhaps an idea for other society editors. The BAS meet on alternate Fridays in the Bridgend Bowls Centre. Contact Clive Down on 01656 740754 for details of meetings.

CAMBRIDGE AA and CAMBRIDGE YOUNG ASTRONOMERS Nov/Dec's issue of 'Capella' has a very amusing front cover and a number of very interesting articles including, the last part of a series of articles on the phantom planet - Vulcan, part 2 of fascinating musing on the possibilities of life on other planets, and 'Why Should we Believe in Relativity?'

The society now has a new web site address. <http://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/caa/caahome.html>

For membership details, contact the Membership Secretary, David Herbert, 67 Howard Close, Cambridge, CB5 8QU.

CRAWLEY AS Crawley AS has a new secretary. He is Ron Garner, 1 Pevensy Close, Pound Hill, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 7BL. Tel: 01293 531096.

CRAYFORD MANOR HOUSE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY Crayford member Bert Carpenter along with Andrew Elliot of Reading organised a very successful meeting of the European Symposium of Occultation Projects. The meeting was held at the RGO Cambridge from Sept. 5th to 10th and included two days of lectures and visits to places such as Greenwich, Avebury, Stonehenge and Mullard Centre.

On the 16th Oct. Dr John Mason gave an excellent lecture on the Cassini mission. This occasion was very significant as it was John's 21st year of lecturing at Crayford. John was presented with a colourful waistcoat

and card as a token of our appreciation. John lectures twice a year at Crawford and always gives an original and informative account of what ever topic he chooses. In the pub afterwards, numerous toasts to John's health were made.

We have an excellent programme of lectures with speakers such as Dr Alan Chapman, Dr Peter Williams, Dr David Strickland, Dr Paul Roche and many more. Anyone wanting details can contact Roger Pickard on 01732 850663.



LA SOCIÉTÉ GUERNESIAISE ASTRONOMY SECTION This November/December's *Sagittarius* contains a very useful list of '99 total solar eclipse web sites and an interesting article on the 1927 total eclipse. In the article there is a plea for anyone who might know of someone who was at the 1927 eclipse to get in touch with them. If you were, or know of anyone who was, or would like the get hold of the eclipse web site list, or even if you are heading towards Guernsey for your holidays contact Geoff Falla the Hon. Secretary on Guernsey 724101 for more details of the programme. Alternatively look at <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/estate/vs76/astrosec.htm>

AS of HARINGEY ASH include a very useful section in their newsletter '2002' entitled 'Meeting Preview'. This, as the name suggests, contains a summary preview of a forthcoming lecture so that members can get some idea of what is going to be covered and thus be able to ask relevant questions on the night. Contact Gary Marriott on 0181 803 5961 or e-mail - expo@garym.demon.co.uk for more details of the programme or look on the Web at <http://www.garym.demon.co.uk/index.htm>

HUDDERSFIELD & DISTRICT

P&AS 'Omega' carries an interesting article on the Solar System. The society meets at 4A Railway Street on Friday nights 7.30 p.m. - 9.30 p.m. Talk to Philip Heppenstal on 01484 661497

LETCHEWORTH & DISTRICT AS The November issue of the LDAS newsletter had me in stitches with their newspaper headlines article!!! There were also lots of interesting astronomical news items. Contact Eric Hutton on 01462 626032 for further details of meetings.

LIVERPOOL AS Congratulations to the LAS News Circular, which is 10 years old in November '97. The October issue had an interesting article on sunspots and a report on the 1997 total solar eclipse. Contact Ken Clark at 31 Sandymount Drive, Wallasey, L45 0LJ with a SAE or on 0151 638 3270 for more details of the LAS programme. Alternatively, try the Web on: <http://www.liv.ac.uk/~ggastr/home.html>

NORTH EAST LONDON AS Meetings are held on the third Sunday of each month (except August) at Wanstead House. The Programme Secretary, Andrew Lawrence, can be contacted on 01376 510329.

NORWICH AS The BAA out of town meeting was held in Norwich on the 13th September at the University of East Anglia (U.E.A.) with Patrick Moore and John Mason giving the public talk on the Saturday evening, the subject being 'Mars - past, present and future'. On the Sunday 14th there was a visit to the Norwich Astronomical Society's Seething Observatory situated about 8 miles south of Norwich in a good dark site. Before looking round the 2 acre site, a slide talk was given on the 50+ year history of the society, which included details of the 3 sites that the society had progressed though. As well as the 30" Newtonian in the 20ft dome, they were shown round the newly finished 10ft dome, which houses a 10 1/2 inch reflector with a Horace Dall signed mirror. The Society had also just completed building 6 concrete pads, 2 metres square, for members' and society's 'lugable' instruments. Some of these are fitted with columns for easy mounting of Meads etc. A photo was taken of John Mason by the official opening plaque, as the plaque was not ready in July 1995 and a mock paper version had been used!

With regular public open evenings each month through the autumn-spring, the society has managed to get its membership back up to the 100+ region it had before the move out of Norwich 3 years ago.

Contact Malcolm Jones on 01508 578392 for more details.

SALFORD AS September 22nd. 16 members attended Dr. Patrick Moore's lecture "Into Space" held at the Tameside Theatre, Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester. Covering 40 years, he spoke on space travel and Lunar Apollo missions but mainly on the planets and their satellites, touching briefly on other celestial objects outside the planetary system and the possibility of the existence of distant planets supporting life forms. The talk, accompanied by colourful slides, was delivered with his usual flair and expertise.

October 25th. 7 members attended the star party at the Astronomy Centre, Todmorden. In taking place on site, at the observatory, we were able to capture the real atmosphere of a star party once again. There were some very interesting talks: - John Singleton on his "Visit to the Birr Castle 72 inch Reflecting Telescope" (nicknamed "The Leviathan"). Full restoration is scheduled for October 98 - John Martin on "How to build a Schmidt Camera", accompanied by the (almost finished) 12" he's built himself - and Peter Drew on "The future of the Astronomy Centre". Once dark, observing took place until complete cloud cover took over around 9.00pm.

The society is well into the winter session of lectures, workshops and public open nights. Unfortunately, the observatory has recently suffered two more break-in attempts, which though unsuccessful, have caused some damage to the building.

Further enquiries contact Kath Redford on 0161 794 3179.

SCOTTISH ASTRONOMERS GROUP

The October issue of the SAG Mag carried a fascinating and comprehensive article on a paper entitled 'Studying Star-Spots'. Readers with access to the web can see the paper on

<http://www.st-and.ac.uk/astronomy.preprints.html>

Contact Ken Mackay at Hayford House, Cambusbaron, Stirling FK7 9PR for details of the programme.

SOLENT AS Another society which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year, along with Haringey.

Congratulations! For information on the programme contact Ken Medway on 01703 582204.

WEST CORNWALL AS The society was not fortunate in receiving Millennium funding for its Cornwall Planetarium Project but they have not given up! They are now exploring other

ations to find funding. Astronomers have a reputation for being persistent. The WCAS meet in Falmouth on the first Wednesday and in Helston on the third Thursday of each month. Contact The Secretary, Robin Hughes, on 01209 890736 for more information of forthcoming events.

WEST OF LONDON AS Contact Duncan Radbourne on 0181 952 2816 for information on events.

WORTHING AS Meetings take place on the second Wednesday of each month in the Heene Church Rooms, Heene Road, Worthing, commencing at 7.30 p.m. Contact Nick Quinn at nick@nquinn.demon.co.uk for full details of the programme.

WOLVERHAMPTON AS WAS has an interesting series of forthcoming lectures and meet on alternative Mondays between September and April at 7.30p.m. at Beckminster Methodist Church Hall, Birches Barn Road, Wolverhampton. Contact Michael Bryce, Secretary WAS, at Iona, 16 Yellowhammer Court, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY10 4PP; Tel: 01562 863545; e-mail:

FROM HON/TREASURER TO THE F.A.S.

Those who read the news letters from the F.A.S. will see that I have taken over the management of the F.A.S. Accounts as from May 17th. 1997, a request from the committee. I am also the Hon/Treasurer of the Worthing A.S. a position held for the past two years. Other accounts I audit for various small groups within my area.

Leaving the accounts to one side, I am a member of Worthing A.S. for the past six-years, my astronomical interest is photography, planets and constellations, I have a Celestron 8", Tameron 4", with various camera and lens attachments, the camera's I use are Olympus OM1 & OM10. To date I have completed over forty prints during the past three years and have sold a few. I am a member of the local camera club and was for my sins awarded certificates and a cup for amateur photographer 1996/97 in an area competition.

In the past five years I have taken my hobbies more seriously and enjoy what I am doing. My astronomical society has a large membership with many different sections, wide range of equipment and support from members. I attended my first F.A.S./Convention at Cambridge this year, and met many old friends from previous years, also

renewed new friendship with various societies from around UK. The convention was attended by over 180 members this year and the lectures held were well supported. I look forward to all your support in the coming years ahead. Regards and CLEAR SKIES.

F.A.S. - ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR 1ST SEPTEMBER 1996 TO 31ST AUGUST 1997

The F.A.S. Accounts are available for Member Societies Secretaries/Treasurers from the Hon/Treasurer. Societies who request a copy of the accounts, please send a S.A.E with a A5 envelope, to the F.A.S. Hon/Treasurer.

NEWSLETTERS WANTED!

The Royal Astronomical Society library has not got issues 1 - 4 of the F.A.S. newsletter. They are now asking for the help of the F.A.S. societies. If you have a spare copy of the relevant newsletters would you please contact either Pam Gill (at the address at the top of the newsletter) or the RAS direct. The Contact is:

Mary Chibnall
Assistant Librarian
Royal Astronomical Society
Burlington House
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W1V 0NL
Tel: 0171 734-3307/4582
Fax: 0171 494-0166
E-mail: mic@ras.org.uk

PLANET WATCHING

Whilst I go out of my way to observe planetary conjunctions, this summer all the planets were visible spread out across the sky from dusk to pre-dawn, an event even rarer than a visible conjunction. This meant it was possible to see all the planets in one night which is what I did in August, with the exception of Pluto which, although on view, was beyond my range of equipment on hand at the time. From Scotland the unfavourable inclination of the ecliptic to the western horizon would have rendered Mercury impossible and Venus very difficult, but I was in Hungary staying with my son. Even from Hungary where I saw nearly all, Mercury was still the problem. So I went to Southern Spain (yes, Hungarians now go on package holidays to Spain too!) and was delighted to have glimpsed Mercury as an evening star in

nearby August (still awkward inclination of ecliptic but made up for by a wide elongation). Then higher up Venus close to Regulus, further up still Mars with Spica. Towards the south Antares marked where Pluto would have been seen had I had the light grasp, and Jupiter was up towards the east of Capricornus which helped me locate Uranus and Neptune. Later Saturn was followed by Hamal and then the Pleiades with a waning crescent moon. But that was not all. Ceres was located east of Jupiter, fainter than normal being a month before opposition, Pallas was more challenging despite being not long past opposition and high above the ecliptic in Aquila. Flora was a challenge met in Cetus below the square of Pegasus as was Vesta months before opposition but within range in the morning also in Cetus, below Hamal. I tried but failed to identify Metis which was below the Pleiades not far from the waning crescent moon and a rapidly returning twilight of dawn, with the appearance of Alderbaran finalising a wonderful journey across the heavens. Graham Young (Dundee AS)

DARK SKIES CHANGE

Gerald Gilligan has now stepped down for the post of Co-ordinator for the BA Campaign for Dark Skies for members societies of the NWGAS. His place has been taken by Mr Peter Wilson who may be contacted at:

65 Park Lane
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 9ER

Tel: 01270 761195 (Home)
E-mail: P.Wilson@btinternet.com

Gerald hopes that societies will help Peter in his new post, and wishes him all the best as part of the continuing battle to save our dark skies from light pollution.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Jan 30th/31st - AstroFest. This year it will be held in London at Kensington Town Hall. Contact Alan Dowdell on 01962 847768 for more details. (See also front cover notice.)

May 9th - F.A.S. AGM in Newbury (Not finalised).

Deadline for submission for next newsletter - 6th February 1998.
Send to Pam Gill, Editor (address at top of front page).