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Issue 34

Federation of Astronomical Societies

EDITORIAL

By now many of you will have 'celebrated' the coming of Autumn with its beautiful clear, crisp nights. At least that is how I remember it from my childhood days in the countryside of South Yorkshire. We, Chris and I, are hoping that those sorts of nights are coming back. I can imagine that you are reading this in amazement and saying to yourselves "What's he talking about?" Well, the good news is that our local authority, Wychavon, part of the County of Hereford and Worcester seem to be on the ball about lighting. The village which we live in has - or rather had - approximately 100 houses spread over about a square mile, recently developers have bought up some land in the village centre and have built 40 or so new houses but the local Parish Council put pressure on and all the lighting (which we have to have by law!) is full cut-off!! At the same time Evesham have replaced about 20% of their lighting with full cut-off lanterns. Things are definitely happening.

On a sadder note, I see that at least two Federated Societies have run into trouble with local Authority and rates. I have enclosed an edited piece about

Mexborough & Swinton AS and the sad tale of their new Observatory and of course there is the ongoing saga of Huddersfield AS and water rates (£1 a pint), add to that the cut in funding and it is fairly obvious that Astronomy is under pressure. Strange that it seems to be being treated like a Golf Club or other money-making set-up.

The other bone of contention at the moment is INSURANCE. I use large letters because that seems to be the way that insurance companies see their profits on Astronomy. Chris has had several phone calls from Societies desperate after receiving the demands for insurance on the Society observatory and/or third party insurance for observing sessions. Maybe it is time that the FAS revived Ken Marcus's ill-fated Group Insurance scheme where one premium covered all participating Societies. Societies should think about it and possibly we could give the matter an airing at the next AGM.

By the way, wasn't it a shame for those of us South of Derby on 11/12th August. But wasn't it lucky that we didn't have a meteor storm - I really would have been mad.

Clear Skies and Good Speakers!

Ken Sheldon

THE MEXBOROUGH & SWINTON SAGA

You may remember that in 1989 Mexborough And Swinton AS were the winners of the Astronomy Now Astroquiz. The prize-money stimulated the Observatory project and after a period of fund-raising the Society Observatory called the J A Jones-Hooper Observatory, named for the late Joseph Albert Jones. Hooper is the name of the small village where the building was erected. The only landmark before the Observatory was Hooper Stand, a memorial to the quelling of the Jacobite Rebellion. (Editor's note - Hooper Stand was the most distant recognisable object on the skyline from my childhood home and I've never been there!)

The building is of reconstituted stone, 5metres square and 3m high topped by a 1m circular wall to take a 4m metal dome. The ground floor consists of a large utility room, a darkroom, a toilet and an entrance lobby containing the stairs to the dome.

The telescope is an 18" f4.5 built by Peter Drew, of the Astronomy Centre. Peter is Honorary President of MSAS and did them a good deal. Apparently it is a superb instrument.

Fundraising efforts include sponsored wheelchair pushes - including one from West Yorks' Rosse Observatory to Hooper and a sponsored swim across Lake Windemere in November. In the latter event both participants - Mark Benton and Michael Waterfield, MSAS Secretary and Vice-president respectively, survived the event.

The Observatory was opened by The Mayor & Mayoress of Rotherham, Councillor Jack and Mrs Betty Carr in May. From a fuller report by Les Marsden MSAS Chairman. More details from Les on 0709 584217

(The sting in the tale is that having built an observatory for Society use and for use by school children, remember Astronomy in the National Curriculum, Rotherham Council have sent the Society a council tax bill for £400 - I don't know yet what the final outcome will be. - KS)



Members Of Mexborough And Swinton AS celebrating the opening of their new Observatory (Before the £400 rates bill arrived)

1993 will see less NEW missions than 1992 but there should still be much of interest to astronomers:

* NASA "Wind" - a solar wind monitoring craft, to be launched in August. Destined to sit at the L1 Lagrange point between the Earth and Sun

* US Air Force/Dept of Energy "Alexis" - a craft carrying an array of sensors to produce all sky images of X-ray background radiation.

* ISAS "ASTRO-D" - a Japanese craft to conduct X-ray spectroscopy and imaging. The February launch is from Kagoshima in Japan.

* NASA "ATLAS-2" - on pallets in a shuttle's cargo bay. Includes instruments monitoring the Solar Constant and short-medium term variability of the Sun's output across the whole spectrum. This March mission will also deploy a SPARTAN craft with a white-light coronagraph and a UV spectrometer for solar studies (retrieved later)

* ESA "Eureca" - this European free-flying craft was launched by the shuttle in August 1992. It will be retrieved by another shuttle in May. Its cargo includes micrometeorite collectors and biological materials exposed to space to see if they can survive in space as spores (a test of Fred Hoyle's theories)

* DARA "Orfeus" - this 1 m German/US far-extreme UV telescope will be released during a July shuttle mission for about a week. It will be retrieved at the end of the mission

* Hubble Space Telescope revisit - the infamous Hubble ST will have its first SCHEDULED revisit in December. The mission will include 3 to 4 spacewalks by astronauts. Their packed work schedule includes maintenance, repairs and upgrades to instruments in the most ambitious shuttle mission so far

* DARA GAUSS - this ultra-wide angle Schmidt camera is one of many experiments on the German funded Spacelab D2 shuttle mission in February. It will carry out Milky Way studies (145 degrees at a time) at 6 wavelengths

* NASA DXS - a US Diffuse X-ray Spectrometer in the cargo bay of a January shuttle mission - to map the X-ray background of the skies

Several other missions may be launched in 1993:

* Interball - 2 CIS craft to study plasma physics in the geotail and auroral regions of

* Regatta - a series of low-cost CIS craft fitted with solar sails, to manoeuvre in space. Missions include plasma physics and astronomy

* Koronas - 2 CIS craft to study the Sun at many different wavelengths. The Ukraine and Germany are major contributors to these missions.

* Priroda (nature) - a new laboratory module for Mir delayed from 1992, included onboard is the "Marina" cosmic ray monitor system

* Ofteq-3 - an Israeli satellite to be launched from the Negev Desert. The Ofteq (Horizon) series are tests of satellite technology but this craft is probably carrying an X-ray telescope as well

Finally, there are milestones in interplanetary missions:

* January and February - more attempts to free the jammed High-Gain Antenna of the Galileo craft

* May 15 - Magellan ends its 4th Venusian year orbiting Venus and project funding runs out

* August 28 - Galileo flies by the asteroid Ida and gathers data

* August 24 - Mars Observer engine "burn" to enter Mars orbit

* December 16 - Mars Observer reaches final "mapping orbit" around Mars

Andy Salmon Birmingham AS and Secretary of the Midland Spaceflight Society

EUROPEAN COLLOQUIUM ON LIGHT POLLUTION

On Saturday, July 3rd, 3 members of Salford Darker Urban Sky Campaign (DUSC) Sub-Committee attended the Colloquium at the University of Reading.

The meeting went well, the only disappointing aspect being the number of people present. We expected more to be interested in this vital subject.

The format took the form of a morning and afternoon session of half hour talks, followed by short 10 minute papers. The morning talks were mainly concerned with defining and tackling light pollution, but also included lighting equipment, guidelines and the need for legislation. The morning was chaired by Dr Patrick Moore.

After lunch, there were problem solving presentations, one a talk on levels of floodlighting (dimming & partial). Robin

Staggett talked on the effects of light pollution on wildlife and the fact that one species in particular, glow-worms, appear to be decreasing in numbers as they breed only in really dark country sites. This session was chaired by A. Thomas of Reading A.S.

Chaired by Dr John Mason, President of the B.A.A. the last session of 10 minute papers was for amateurs to air their views. They presented various aspects of the problems to address, how they have done so and what the results have been so far.

The inevitable happened in so much as later speakers jokingly remarked that earlier speakers had used some of their material. A case of the early bird getting the glow-worm!

A discussion period ended the day. Afterwards we were left with the feeling that there is at least a glimmer of hope on the skyline. However we feel that astronomers should not be complacent regarding this mammoth task, because although there are moves to try to improve lighting, at the same time there seems to be more and more lighting installed.

In the entrance hall were photographs of lighting installations and URBIS had a display of lighting equipment. On sale were "Britain by Night" tee shirts & posters, showing the extent of light pollution over the British Isles.

Kath Redford Salford AS

The editor's comments.

I went to Reading and was pleasantly surprised and pleased with the atmosphere but then I suppose none of the opponents of lighting improvement were going to present themselves to be shot at!

I was particularly disappointed by the small number of Europeans - not Brits but as the Dutch speaker said lighting and light pollution are not considered important in Europe. You can see that from satellite images where the Benelux countries are worse than Britain. Interesting to hear him say "Thank goodness for Britain". Not a frequently heard saying on the Continent one feels.

Not the least important thing about the day was to meet the Salford AS members and people from South Wales and the Midlands. Amateur astronomers are worried by the problems and should be writing to MPs, councillors and County Planning Engineers to ask for moderation and to make the point that we don't want them to switch the lights off but to install modern, efficient and environmentally friendly light fittings.

One other fascinating aspect of the meeting was that Robin's talk stimulated me to go and look for glow-worms. Chris and I found some only half a mile from home. That was a first for me, I had never seen one before. Thanks Robin for bringing it up.

Thanks too to John Mason for organising the day, it was worth while and hopefully the precursor to other meetings of the same type. KS

AYLESBURY AS Contact Nigel Sheridan, 22, Moor Park, WENDOVER HP22 6AX. AAS were heavily involved in the FAS Summer Convention on July 10th in the persons of Tony Balfour and Ian Welland. Unfortunately Ian's commitments mean that he will have to give up the Chiltern Reg job.

BEDFORD AS Contact Peter Cox on Bedford 354552 for details of the programme. I know that I shouldn't but every month the BAS Newsletter takes my breathe away with the beautiful cover photo. I don't know how they do it but it is wonderful. The Summer session has been busy with a Barbecue and the FAS Summer meeting. BAS feel that a Chiltern Quiz might be a good idea. By the way the result of the spring Astroquiz between BAS, Cambridge AA and CUAS was CAA 1st, BAS 2nd and CUAS 3rd.

CAMBRIDGE Astronomical Association Contact Dr Frank Murphy on 0223 262421 for details. As usual CAA are busy with the opening of their new main dome at the new site due two days after the FAS Cambridge meeting. Looking at the list of speakers and the goodies that CAA possess it makes you think that being an astro society at the centre of British (no better say English) Astronomy can't be bad! The speakers have included Dr Allan Chapman and Paul Money. Holiday Happenings which is done in co-operation with Cambridge City Council (basically as part of the Cambridge Young Astronomers scene) has included 'The Summer Sky & Outer Planets' and 'Death of the Dinosaurs' very apt now with 'Jurassic Park' so much in the news. Interesting articles have included Peter King's 'My Trip to Orlando' and Alex Simpson's 'Around Columbus' World'.

COTSWOLD AS Contact John Daniel on 0453 757026 for details. Speakers have included Dick Warden on 'Music & Astronomy' Jeremy Cook with 'The Moon' and Andrew Elliott on 'Video Astronomy'. A small group visited the Herschel Museum during August. Speakers to come include John Fletcher (Astrophotography), Dr Allan Chapman (James Bradley) and Fred Watkins (Caribbean Astronomy).

CRAWLEY AS I managed to get the date and time of the Crawley meetings wrong. They take place on the first and third Friday of each month at the Ifield Community Centre starting at 7.30 pm. Contact Andrew Dale on 0403 56932 for meeting details.

La Société GUERNESAISE Astronomy Section The contact is Geoff Falla on 724101. *Sagittarius* the Newsletter of the Société carries the interesting news that the Society is to co-operate with Canadian astronomer Harald Shenk who will be observing asteroids with comet-like coma using the HST. In the July/August issue there is a 16 page supplement with 14 finder charts on the Local Cluster of Galaxies. A query in the Newsletter about Radio Astronomy prompts me to suggest that Mark

Humphreys might write to Malcolm Jones Secretary of Norwich AS who is also secretary of a Radio Astronomy Group.

HAMPSHIRE Astronomy Group Contact Rod Dodd on Waterlooville 254032 for more details. HAG are still recovering from their bad experience with a guest speaker who's name inadvertently escaped my red pencil in this years Handbook. On the happier side their fight for improvement in lighting seems to be having some good results. HAG gave a Good Lighting Award to Portsmouth Lighting Engineers were the recipients. The 20" is undergoing essential maintenance but John Lewis's 16" is standing in. The Open Weekend is 17th to 19th Sept probably too late now.

HUDDERSFIELD APS The Society have lost their battle over water rates and have lost a chunk of their Council grant but is still functioning - the Autumn/Winter programme has 28 events upto Christmas. Talk to Marcus Armitage on 0484 655070 for details.

IRISH AS To find out more about the activities contact James Lynch on Dublin 820 2135. The Society paid a visit to Dunsink Observatory on May 22nd, 65 members and guests took part together with some members of Tullamore AS. The group had lectures by John Flannery on "The riddle of the Lunar atmosphere", by William Dumbleton on "The History of the Birr Observatory", followed after tea by John O'Neill talking about the 1992 December Lunar Eclipse. Video tape presentations on various subjects were also made together with exhibits of computer and radio astronomy equipment. After the success of the IAS Astrofest in late March astronomy appears to be very active in Ireland.

ISLE OF MAN AS I received a copy of the Society's new Journal. When Patrick visited the Society he suggested that a journal distributed to local schools and libraries might boost interest in the Society and the hobby. It is a good product and should help! Meetings are on first Thursday of each month at the Quarterbridge Hotel, Douglas beginning at 8.30pm. Contact James Martin on 0624 842954.

LEITCHWORTH & DISTRICT AS Contact Eric Hutton on 0462 431988 for more details of events. The observatory at Standalone Farm Centre is now operational and training sessions for members wishing to observe from there are under way. Society meetings have included Gerry Workman speaking about Uranus and Peter Bowers speculating about the fact that his Observatory is at the Centre of the Universe. Star Parties are now a regular feature of the L&DAS scene. The July Newsletter contained a long and useful Meteor section.

LIVERPOOL AS To get more info contact Ken Clark, 31 Sandymount Drive, Wallasey, L45 0LJ. The LAS News Circular carries several reports of visits made by Liverpool's traveller - namely Gerard Gilligan. He

describes his visits to Reading for the Colloquium in July and the Star Party at the Astronomy Centre. In the September edition there is an interesting story about the LAS collaboration with Fuji TV in setting up an Outside Broadcast at the Llyn Brenig site to observe meteors - yes - you guessed it 11/12 August. The programme was for an insert into Japanese TV's Newsnight equivalent. In a 30 minute clear patch they did manage to get some bright meteors. Pity it was such a grotty night! The Observatory now sports some new LV eyepieces which get a good write-up from Tony Williams.

LOWESTOFT & GT YARMOUTH AS Are looking forward to a new season we look back on an eventful year. Struggling with a mere handful of regulars attending meetings it was decided to hold an exhibition at the local library. Chairman Danny Wheeler produced some superb photos. Secretary Bob Cheek turned out some impressive displays and the whole week was manned by the faithful handful. It had the desired result with 11 new members turning up to hear Paul Money give one of his high standard presentations. The year progressed steadily. A rather large gathering turned out on the night of the Perseids along with the local radio LTR-FM but the clouds obscured the show. The following night was crystal clear and a small crowd watched a superb Perseid display. Meetings are held at 7.30 on the 3rd Thursday of each month from Sept to April at Kirkley High School Lowestoft.

report by Bob Cheek 0502 589273

NORTHEAST LONDON AS Contact Bernard Beeston on 081 363 5696 for details of programme and venue. Talks and discussions have covered such wide ranging topics as Solar Observing from Geoff Elston, Music of the Spheres, The HST and the 1943 Sky & Telescope. Bernard made a bubble Sextant which had been described in S&T.

ORWELL AS The Society is still busy with regular observing sessions and meetings. I don't know if they got to the Canaries. A couple of nice descriptive observing articles in the last couple of Newsletter plus Weather satellite reception. Contact Peter Richards 0473 659806 for more details of programme.

PLYMOUTH AS Contact Sheila Evans on 0752 706908 for more details of programme. PAS are active both in the Lecture room and observing. A visit to Goonhilly where the hosts were SW Cornwall AS was shared with Tavistock members. Some major successes have been achieved by Alan Penman including getting Safeways to cap their globe lights! Speakers this Autumn are Lawrence Harris on Sept 10th, John Stapleton on October 8th and an intersociety quiz with Tavistock AS on November 12th. Christmas Party on December 10th.

SALFORD AS On the night of August 11/12th, the peak performance of the Perseids was very disappointing, cloud cover being the main cause. A group of Salford

IF YOU ARE ASKED TO GIVE A TALK AT A SCHOOL OR TO ANY OTHER GROUP YOUR SOCIETY SECRETARY HAS A SET OF GUIDELINES AND A SYLLABUS. ASK HIM IF YOU NEED IT!!

members went to dark site in the hills in high hopes of at least an above average shower (if not a storm) but once there the cloud thickened. Giving up on it after a couple of hours and returning home to the City, small breaks in the clouds enabled members to see a few meteors. Some members who from the start observed from their gardens from the start, saw more Perseids in total than those who had travelled to the dark site initially. Inevitably the following night the skies were reasonably clear. This time members observed from their gardens and though more Perseids were seen, it was overall a non-starter from start to finish *Report From Kath Redford*
Contact Kath Redford on 061 794 3179 for more details about the future programme.

SCOTTISH ASTRONOMERS GROUP
SAG are still active and their Magazine reflects that. Some very nice articles in there including one on "A Spectroscope for Under a Tenner" I will get permission before I publish but it looks fun as well as being useful. Contact Brian Kelly, 449 Brook Street, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 2DX for more details of the Societies.

SOLENT AAS Details of meetings from Ken Medway on 0703 582204. SAAS hold regular meeting both for lectures and for observing at one of the Societies observatories. The newsletter includes a regular constellation guide and the Society also has some publications.

SOUTH AS Phone John Larard on 081 299 1783 for details of the programme and meetings. The SAS provide a really good set of Observing data both for Planets and the major Minor planets. Geoff Elston is kept busy by his speaking trips and also by his JAS/BAA Solar Section commitments.

SE KENT AS The telescope making class has nearly finished with two 6" and one 8" mirror already completed with work continuing on three more 8". March was a video evening at a members home. In April Jane Weeks, manager of the Old Greenwich Observatory talked about the refurbishment. In May 23 members of SEKAS visited Patrick Moore's home at Selsey. In June we were involved in an intersociety quiz with Maidstone AS. Rematch next year. The outing was to the Old Royal Observatory and 24 members enjoyed a look at the "new" setup. We hold public observing meetings on the last Friday of each month in Walmer with Society observing meetings every other Saturday in Aylesham.

Report by Andrew McCarthy (0303 241933)
The July Newsletter has a good article on Telescope Defects.

WEST OF LONDON AS Contact Robin Scagell on 0895 637463 for programme details. As the September meeting will have taken place by the time most of you read this I can say "The Winter is Here!" but the talk

will be on the Sun. I haven't heard but I directed one of the TV News organisations to WOLAS since I know that they were intending to hold a Perseid Watch. Unfortunately I can't imagine that they were any luckier than me.

WEST YORKSHIRE AS *Phobos* tells me that the WYAS programme has been as busy as usual and looking at the programme for the Autumn and Winter they don't intend to ease off too much. The Society are of course hosting next year's Summer Convention as a celebration of their Anniversary. Pete McKenna has provided me with more material for the Newsletter bank. Contact Pete Lunn on 0924 360064 for details of the Autumn programme.

WOLVERHAMPTON AS Malcolm Astley on 0902 783212 is the man to approach for details of the Society's programme. Haven't heard much but the IUA meeting must have kept the Society busy.

WORCESTER AS Ring Ian Gray on 0386 47352 for more details of programme. The Summer session has been busy. The July speaker was Merlin Ellis talking on "Pluto and Charon" and August was on open meeting with Ian Gray showing some interesting planetary photography. Chris Sheldon demonstrating a 30" diameter CCD image of the Moon and Ken Sheldon playing some taped Perseid meteor signals. Forthcoming speakers include Victor Clube in October. November is the AGM and Quiz.

WORTHING AS Busy is the only way to describe WAS. Skittles (with beer probably), lectures, Barbecues all feature in the Summer programme but probably the most important event is to take place the day after Cambridge FAS meeting namely that the Ardingly Drive Observatory will be opened by the Mayor of Worthing. The other major event is the earthquake that put Selsey & Worthing together. (Talk to Pam Spence about that!) Ring Nick Quinn on 0903 814090 for details of the programme.

F.A.S. SUMMER CONVENTION
High Wycombe 10th July 1993

A pleasant morning drive got us to High Wycombe in good time.

As usual Alan Drummond had beaten us to it and was organised with programmes and free copies of the Chiltern Group Newsletter.

Upstairs several Chiltern Group Societies, Aylesbury, Bedford, Kettering and Wycombe to name but four had set up displays showing their work. Very impressive it was too. The B.A.A. and J.A.S. were represented. The J.A.S. bookstall run by Robin Scagell was well appreciated by the usual avid book-buying fraternity. Three or four traders were also

present notably David Hinds, who was isolated in the entrance foyer, and PC Connections with the fascinating collection of astronomy software now available for the PC.

The meeting start with a 'Hello' from Tony Balfour and Ian Welland. The Speakers were Mike Maunder, Gillian Pearce, Andrew Elliott, Geoff Elston and the inimitable Allan Chapman. I think that they were an excellent group giving pleasure to all types of astronomers. Everyone who attended enjoyed it, except for the coffee! We owe Ian our thanks.

THANK YOU IAN.

THE FOUNDER MEMBERS PLAQUE

On Saturday, April 24th, 40 members and friends gathered at the Salford Observatory for the "Ceremony of the Plaque". Mrs Marjorie Taylor and Mrs Gladys Whittaker unveiled a plaque to Arthur Taylor, the Founder of Salford Astronomical Society and the three other Founder Members, Douglas Cooper, Hector Wheddon and Allan Whittaker. Both ladies unveiled the plaque, together pulling on a ribbon and each gave a speech. Our Chairman proposed a toast which was followed by a tea.

Sadly Arthur is now the only surviving Founder Member. He is retired and he and his wife now live in Little Dewchurch, near Hereford. Mrs Whittaker lives in Summerseat, Lancs.

From Kath Redford SAS

THE F.A.S. ASTROCALENDAR
WILL BE AVAILABLE LATE
SEPTEMBER. CONTACT ALAN
DRUMMOND FOR MORE
DETAILS.

Don't forget the JAS meetings are now in Marylebone Road. Contact Guy Fennimore, 36 Fairway, Keyworth, Nottingham. NG12 5DU FAS

Publication dates for Newsletter
December 10th deadline November 21st
March 14th deadline February 23rd
June 14th deadline May 25th

1994 Dates for your Diary
1st May AGM & Convention.
4th June Summer Convention & WYAS anniversary - Pontefract
24th Sept Autumn Convention.

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IF YOU GOT HERE WITHOUT GOING TO CAMBRIDGE YOU PROBABLY MISSED IT!