

Saturday 16th February 2019 - Rodington Village Hall



The societies' monthly meetings continue despite the poor weather. Member John Thatcher entertained the eager crowd which included some new faces as well as some longstanding members. Tonight's topic was centred on space astronomers or more to the point how can the humble public get into space? A tour of what space projects the rich and famous were spending their money on, giving us an insight to the fact that space is not just a state or nations prerogative. Following tea and biscuits there was plenty of time to catch up on all things astronomical as well as some that were not. Individual help was given to those who had brought their instruments for a bit of TLC. Let us all hope for clear skies at our next event!

Saturday 9th February 2019 – Little Ness Village Hall

Our second viewing session at Little Ness Village hall on Saturday 9th Feb went down very well despite a rather early finish due to cloudy skies. We were joined by new budding stargazers who, thanks to Stan, can now identify the North Star, the Pleiades and Orion. It is amazing what you can learn in half an hour of clear sky! We are looking forward to our next session on 9th of March.

Saturday 9th February 2019 – Carding Mill Valley (National Trust)

A full house packed into the pavilion half way up the valley for the first of this year's "Stars in your Skies" events with Pete Williamson FRAS. Pete's first evening took us on a tour of Orion the Hunter, a constellation easily recognised by the three stars in his belt, and his sword hanging from it. The Orion Nebula is a birthplace of stars and it decorates the sword of Orion. His bow and arrow point towards other features and constellations too. Unfortunately the weather did not cooperate so we could not put into practise what we had learned. Never mind we will return for another attempt on October 26th 2019.



Friday 8th & Saturday 9th February 2019 – Attingham Park (National Trust)

Over 100 stargazers were attracted to the refurbished cafe in the courtyard at Attingham Park. They were treated to a wide range of talks and presentations. Tours of the virtual night sky were on offer as well as any help and advice on telescopes available. Talks were varied touching subjects as the "difference between stargazer and astronomer" through to being "an astronomer in space". Unfortunately the weather did not allow any viewing of the night sky – never mind there will always be next time.

Saturday 19th January 2019 - Rodington Village Hall



A group of fifty stargazers, some returning, some for the first time, turned out for the first monthly meeting of the year for the society. As usual the weather was not cooperative, so we were grateful for an informative talk by a committee member on the forthcoming Lunar Eclipse. Many misconceptions were addressed and the value of making an effort to view such a special event was highlighted. Most of the evening seemed to be spent drinking tea and catching up after the festive season, as well as seeking out expert advice from more knowledgeable members on our new year projects.

Saturday 12th January 2019 - Little Ness Village Hall



The inaugural event at Little Ness had all the indications of carrying on where Ford Caravan Park had left off, cold and cloudy. However as I turned into the car park I was treated to a pleasant surprise. A small gathering of stargazers had congregated to see what all the fuss was about. With a mixture of Shropshire AS members and local inhabitants, looking to make use of the dark skies I have to say it was worth the effort of arguing with my Sat-Nav to find the village hall. We were treated to a clear hole in the sky through which we could explore Orion, Taurus, Gemini Auriga and parts of Ursa Major, and just for our benefit the Moon put in a brief appearance. In addition help was afforded to new telescope owners on setting up their instruments with tips and advice on what might assist their enjoyment ranging from laser collimators through to star maps for smart phones. All in all a very enjoyable start to the new year.

Friday 18th November 2017 - Longnor Village Hall

Chairman Peter Gunn whisked three committee members away to a small village south of Shrewsbury, where they were greeted by an eager audience. Many of the youngsters occupying the front rows with adults congregated at the bar. Steve Sz wajkun started with a short presentation investigating the point when a stargazer becomes an astronomer making good use of society members wide collection of images. This was followed by a revamped presentation by Roy Noons describing the main characteristics of the Solar System which raised many questions. Following a chance to recharge our glasses John Thatcher, shared with the audience, the latest developments in the field of space telescopes with particular reference to the JWST, drawing on his 10 years of working on the project. The Shropshire weather did not co-operated as usual. However the clouds did part as we were leaving, ensuring many participants stayed a little longer with just enough clear sky to identify a number of popular constellations. With whetted appetites the visitors headed home for well earned cup of coco leaving us to pack away, reflecting on another successful outreach event.

Friday 27th October 20017 - Petton (transparency: 3)



The SAS continues its theme of 'pop-up' astronomy observing events by spending an evening at the request of residents of Petton in north Shropshire. The site was the elevated field next to St Raphael and St Isidor church. With clear views to the horizons the clear sky offered the opportunity for some good observing, for a change. The moon, 48% illuminated, provided the main target for the local stargazers, many who had not peered through a telescope. Although the damp sky hampered crystal clear views we spent time identifying the constellations and discussing their associated myths. The local congregation provided tea and cakes from the sanctuary of the church hall. I fear we will be back for more observing soon.

Saturday 23rd September 20017 - Rodington Village Hall



Why is it that cloudy skies tend to coincide with our monthly meetings? However, prepared as ever to entertain the 40 odd stargazers present, member Pete Williamson shared his work with I-telescope and the Faulkes robotic telescopes. He demonstrated what was possible with very little experience and input. Coupled with tea and biscuits and lots of chatter about astronomy and a telescope clinic members drifted away contented as ever. With a return to proper time (GMT) next month we might, just might, get the opportunity for some early evening observing. Here's hopping!

Tuesday 19th September 28th 2017 - Oswestry U3A

Three committee members were faced with over 100 U3A members at their weekly meeting anticipating an astronomy presentation! With a big intake of breath Steve launched into a discussion of the differences between stargazers and astronomers. This was the second time the SAS had been invited to talk to the group which had grown from strength to strength.

Saturday 16th September 2017 Merefest

An enthusiastic group of members spent the day promoting the dark art of stargazing. Lots of talking and drinking tea in-between solar observing. As part of the country pursuits festival it was enjoyed by all even if the cloud cover halted the stargazing as dusk fell.



Saturday 26th August 2017 Attingham Park Summer Camp

The annual summer camp organised by the National Trust at Attingham Park attracted over 70 eager beavers of all ages. Five society members turned up to share some stargazing after dusk. We did in fact set up appropriate equipment to search for sunspots late in the afternoon. We were lucky amid lots of discussion on how we could use telescopes to view the sun. White, orange and green views were on offer



together with an H-alpha telescope. Following a baked potato to keep us warm we switched to stargazing. The moon provided a magical target for the younger viewers with Saturn providing that 'wow' moment before we retired for the evening.

Wednesday 23rd August 2017 Welshpool U3A Astronomy Group Summer Gathering



The annual gathering saw a number of new members to the group who brought their telescopes along for guidance and help. As well as solar viewing the focus of the day was 'space flight'. John introduced and explained the rocket equation while Steve led a practical investigation using film canister rockets. A sunny day and rural setting allowed for a very productive group meeting.

Saturday 19th August 2017 - Rodington Village Hall



Cloud cover greeted stargazers, new and hardened, to the August monthly meeting. However, as always we are prepared, member Kev Wildgoose treated the assembled group to his expertise and experience in observing and capturing solar system objects. It is always a difficult task as to which level to pitch such presentations. Kev must have got it right as he was occupied all night with questions and queries. Following a break for tea and biscuits small groups gathered for self-help chats with things like setting up scopes and the old chestnut about which one should I buy. With the tea bags running low the group drifted home to the usually clearing skies.

Saturday 12th August 2017 Perseid Watch @ Nipstone Rock

Scores of enthusiastic stargazers gathered under a cloudy sky full of expectation of catching sight of some spectacular meteors. There was scepticism at the local weather forecast as it looked as if the cloud was set in for the night. However on cue at 10.30pm they parted to reveal a clear sky, well at least until the moon rose high enough to wash out most of the sky. During that hour we were treated to some 'wow' sights as the little grains of debris from the



comet Swift-Tuttle hurtled through the atmosphere. The 'Milky Way' classified dark sky offered plenty of opportunities to view these special events. We were treated to telescope views of Jupiter and Saturn through holes in the dispersing clouds, together with tours of the main constellations, while devouring the BBQ fare. A big thank you to Shropshire Wildlife Trust for the invitation to such a conducive observing sight and providing tasty burgers.

Saturday 5th August 2017 Stars & Stories at Dudmaston Hall

As potential stargazers gathered in the visitors reception to claim their soup the clouds started to clear. SAS members set up their scopes and paraphernalia, as the smoke of the camp fire wafted across the field, whilst chatting with anticipation of an almost cloudless sky. Slowly the group gathered to listen to an enthusiastic story teller who entertained until the sun set. Following a short presentation of what stargazers do, we turned our attention skywards. Jupiter and its moons put on a show followed by a clear Saturn being available for many first timers. As the sky darkened the summer triangle revealed itself alongside many other bright constellations. Unfortunately a near full moon washed out many sights but did not dampen any enthusiasm. As the glowing embers of the fire dimmed we did manage to find our nearest galaxy before we ended another successful night.

Saturday 15th July 2017 Summer Social at RVH

4:30pm saw the usual culprits congregate at Rodington village hall to prepare to welcome members



and guests for the annual social event. Thanks to the ever present Stan Courtney and his telescope, early birds were treated to views of our nearest star together with a number of clear 'sunspots'. Discussion followed as to why and how we could view the Sun through a telescope. At 6pm prompt chairman, Peter Gunn, welcomed the assembled stargazers and invited them to 'attack' the vast array of appetising food that was brought along as part of the 'bring & share' feast. Well fed and watered and with little



motivation to move, committee member John Thatcher adopted the role of Quizmaster. Although light hearted, but with a number of challenging questions the competitive nature of the teams soon emerged. The usual rewards of Mars Bars, Galaxies and Starbursts gave the winners a sugar rush. The evening concluded with a navigation activity presented by Steve Szwajkun. Teams were invited to construct a sextant out of CDs and Lego. They then had to use their creations to identify on a world map their location. Let's just say I am glad we have GPS these days? After an enjoyable and entertaining evening the room cleared in the evening twilight unlike the clouds.

Saturday 24th June 2017 - Meole Brace Fun Day plus Solar Observing at Carding Mill Valley

The volunteers of the SAS were split today between two public events. Chairman Pete led a band of three additional members at the annual 'fun day' at the Meole Brace Science College in Shrewsbury. Over 1000 youngsters brought their parents and guardians to explore and participate in the many activities on offer including viewing a sun spot through specialist equipment.



Saturday 17th June 2017 - Rodington Village Hall



Even as the summer solstice approaches, over 40 stargazers/astronomers turned up at Rodington. Many old faces mingled with *first timers* looking for the 'awe' and 'wonder' that the heavens have to offer. Local radio does reach out to people of Shropshire for which we are always thankful. Appropriate telescopes were set up to treat arriving guests the opportunity to count the sun spots. Armed with tea and coffee the assembled group were treated to an informative and entertaining presentation by member Michael Bourke entitled 'The 4th Dimension' where he explored and discussed the various calendars and their origins. More tea and coffee followed, this time with chocolate hobnobs, as we waited for the sky to darken. Excellent views of Jupiter and Saturn were on offer as we discussed the difference between constellations and asterisms - what with the summer triangle starting to show its self.

As it was getting late this stargazer headed for home to leave the young ones to explore more. Next month is the summer social so get baking!

Saturday 20th May 2017 - Rodington Village Hall

As many as 50 members and interested stargazers turned out to a cloudy Rodington village hall to join our president, Megan Argo, award prizes to the winners in our annual photographic competition. The best in show was awarded to Kev Wildgoose for his image of Neptune. Megan followed this with an outline of her current research including analysing data from recent supernova data. This was followed by a presentation by vice chairman Steve Sz wajkun on the importance of a stable mount for new telescope observers, including a review of what is available, depending on the depth of your pockets. After the mandatory tea and chocolate biscuits the assembled stargazers split into various groups. Some seeking help setting up their telescopes while some seeking help fixing theirs. A number of members continued drinking, catching up on the latest images they had captured. A number set up their instruments outside to view Jupiter and the Galilean moon.



Saturday 13th & Sunday 14th May 2017 - Shropshire Kidsfest

The Society was invited to participate in the second Shrewsbury Kidsfest hence a willing band of volunteers set up on the Friday afternoon ready to do some solar observing and promote the Society over the weekend. In this we were very successful over two long and often sunny days with large crowds and much interest shown in what we do. Not only did we distributed a lot of information aimed at children but we talked to many parents about joining us, naturally stressing what a friendly bunch we are! We also had several requests for our outreach activities with youth groups which we hope will be followed up. How many potential members will take the next step of actually getting into their cars and making it to Rodington remains to be seen but we are sure the existing members will give them a warm welcome (if they haven't already done so).



Saturday 25th March 2017 - Rodington Village Hall

Marches monthly meeting was put back to the fourth Saturday to the benefit of the 40+ members and guests who turned out. Using SPA data, the scale of transparency was estimated to be 4! With clear skies from horizon to horizon, experienced members brought a number of large aperture instruments to view a range of deep sky objects. The remainder of the group made excellent use of binoculars that they brought with them, or used ones provided by the society, to seek out a range of open star clusters. First time stargazers were guided round the sky identifying the constellations with their key stars and learning the benefits of star hopping. Of particular interest was M45 (the Pleiades) and M42 (Orion Nebula) with Jupiter, although low in the sky, drawing some attention.

Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th February 2017 - Attingham Park

Attingham Park Moonwatch was the first major public/SAS event of the year. Friday evening saw paying guests treated to warming wine and talks by Steve Sz wajkun and John Thatcher. The poor weather did not allow the proposed telescope viewing. However guests were presented with a tour of the night sky using Stellarium. The weekend afternoon sessions saw many interested visitors enquiring about a range of space related topics while their youngsters enjoyed making stomp rockets and planispheres while even younger stargazers took to the colouring. As dusk fell we retired to the lawn at the front of the house anticipating the opportunity to make the most of the dark skies. The weather did not cooperate at all allowing a very brief view of Venus, Mars and a waxing crescent moon early on Saturday evening. We were treated to a magnificent moon halo at various times throughout the evening.

28th January 2017 - Carding Mill Valley

"Stars In Your Skies" started the first of this year's series of events, with their new presenter, SAS member Pete Williamson FRAS. Stargazer's at the sell-out event were treated to an evening exploring the star forming region known as the Orion Nebula. Unfortunately the weather was not kind and telescopes brought by supporting members of the SAS remained in the boots of cars. We had to make do with our imaginations. Feedback from guests would suggest that early purchase of tickets for the next instalment would be recommended, see <http://starsinyourskies.org/> for the next event on Saturday 1st April where young stars and cluster will be discussed.



Saturday 21st January 2017 - Rodington Village Hall

Over 40 members and guest, some for the first time, turned out for the societies first meeting of the new year. However even with the new year, things still remain the same, with this part of Shropshire still shrouded in cloud. We are becoming experts at providing what we call 'cloudy night talks' where members share their expertise and interests. Member **Trevor Clifton**, entertained and informed the group with his venture into the dark art of radio astronomy. Coming from an electronics environment he showed us how he constructed the necessary equipment to collect, record and display radio signals from identifiable objects. Following a short refreshment break members broke up into small discussion groups mainly helping guests with their new, or possible dusty equipment

Saturday 3rd December 2016 - Rodington Village Hall AGM

Vice-Chair **Steve Szwajkun** welcomed nearly 50 members and guests to the Annual General Meeting saying that the evening should be a celebration of a successful year and not intentionally tedious. He outlined our continued and developing work with the National Trust at Attingham and Carding Mill Valley and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust at Nipstone Rock. New ventures with the Shropshire Aero Club and Mere's and Mosses and 'Merefest' were also highlighted. Coupled with increased STEMNET commitments the society is going from strength to strength in promoting astronomy throughout Shropshire. The highlight of the evening was a short talk by our newly elected president Dr Megan Argo who updated us on the latest developments in astronomy including Gaia, JWST and LIGO. As the skies cleared a number of members, full of mince pie's and mulled wine, braved the cold to view M31 and M45 together with identifying constellations for new members.

Saturday 5th November 2016 - Tern Hill Observatory

14 interested hardy individuals turned out to what was the first opportunity to seriously use, the newly installed telescope at the community centre at Turn Hill Army Camp. Previous attempts had been thwarted by the weather, which was kind on this occasion. Using maps and guides Uranus was identified and the telescope quickly trained on the blue green blur in the southern skies. Tracking locked on the group took turns to view the ice giant some for the first time. The double star Beta Cigni also known as Albireo in the constellation of Cygnus, was the next target in the poor seeing. With a pair of binoculars, images of Andromeda (M31) and the Pleiades (M45) were compared with those seen through the scope. Lots of discussion followed, regarding which is better and what instrument should one purchase. With the cloud closing in the group dispersed contented that we had been able to view through the telescope at last.



Saturday 24th September 2016 - Rodington Village Hall

Extract from Hermes article

... So on Saturday 24th September the monthly meeting commenced with John Thatcher giving a presentation on past and current theories of the moons to over fifty members and guests ... This was followed by Steve Szwajkun guiding the group round features of the moon including the



terminator, Maria, craters, cones and rilles as well as discussing terms such as phases, libration, albedo and tidal lock ... The highlight of the evening was to be the exhibits provided by NASA and STFC. Members were encouraged to bring along their own moon related collections which they did in abundance. Signed pictures and posters, Apollo memorabilia, meteorite collections amongst other treasured items were all in evidence, with the owners prepared to share their stories. The committee ensured that everybody had ample opportunity to explore, at their leisure, what was an unique opportunity. Support material was provided via the Internet and text, as well as microscopes and lenses all aiming to enhance the experience. It must be said that the support material provided by STFC is very good and suitable across all abilities and ages, and with a little creativity was put to good use. The most pleasing sight was the smiles and grins on people's faces as they worked their way round the various exhibits. Coupled with their questions and disbelief, that these were real samples from the Apollo missions, which they had in the palms of their hands.