



MEXBOROUGH & SWINTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Annual Report & Statement of Accounts

For the year to 31 March 2023

Available online

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Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2023

The trustees of Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society are pleased to present their report and accounts for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Achievements and Performance

Meeting Programme

A total of 49 presentations were given during the year, 10 of these were by member speakers of which there were just 4 different members. Whilst the pandemic forced the introduction of online meetings and opened access to guest speakers who could not reasonably or affordably travel to present at our meetings in person, we feel there is a need in the coming year to encourage and support more member speakers as we had in previous years.

With the Covid-19 restrictions ended our meeting room is open again although most meetings are now offered in a hybrid format – both online and in-person; this is allowing us to reach a wider audience and a greater range of speakers, including some international speakers.

Tickets for most of these meetings were offered on the Eventbrite platform at a ticket price of £2 plus the Eventbrite booking fee. Over the period this gave us an income of £462, this doesn't include some on-line visitors who have paid directly to the Society via BACS.

A total of 61 different visitors paid over the year, including 5 who attended for more than 10 meetings. One visitor paid for attending 40 different meetings, the next frequent visitors were for 24 and 22 visits respectfully.

We place on record our gratitude to all our speakers for their contribution to our programme which covered a wide range of topics in astronomy and its associated sciences.

Membership

The society had a membership of 33 as of 31 March 2023.

Newsletter

11 edition of the society newsletter "The Messenger" were issued and distributed by email. All members with active emails are sent a copy plus 17 non-members who have requested to be on the mail list.

J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory

The carpet tiles in the observatory dome have been deep cleaned to make the dome area more presentable. The telescope control computer now has an off-air time synchronisation capability which is provided by an MSF radio signal receiver. This means the telescopes clock is always correct to within 1 second. The trees to the south of the observatory have been trimmed by society members.

Our insurance company stipulated that the observatory entry and exit door should have Eurocylinder locks fitted as part of the policy renewal terms and conditions. The new locks allow the door to be opened from the inside without a key allowing easy egress in case of a problem. New key sets have been distributed to existing key holders. We note our thanks to Mr Mark Walton for machining new plates to mount the new locks and his welding skills fitting the components to the observatory door.

A programme of maintenance and cleaning work at the observatory is planned for spring and summer 2023.

Community Access & Outreach Programmes

With Covid restrictions being lifted through the early part of 2022 the society decided to resume our Community Access Programme welcoming visitors to the observatory and re-engage in outreach activities.

The RSPB site at Old Moor contacted us and quickly arranged for two Solar Sunday events in July and August and we arranged another two at the J A Jones Observatory in May and June. The RSPB Old Moor events were well received with many visitors stating that they had made a special trip to use the solar scopes belonging to members.

During the summer months contact was made with the groups who had asked to visit the J A Jones Observatory and over the course of the observing season (September to March) ten groups of Beavers, Cubs and Scouts visited the observatory (one cancellation due to snow). Some 148 youths

and 40 adults visited. We have had to implement a waiting list for the 2023/24 season which has eight entries to date.

The Society was pleased to welcome the Mexborough and District Amateur Radio Society (MADARS) to the observatory and grounds for the National HF Day on the 3 and 4 September 2022. MADARS were able to take advantage of the observatory position on the ridge above Rotherham to take part in this annual national event.

October saw us return to RSPB Old Moor for a joint evening event, with RSPB staff conducting viewings of roosting birds and bat walks followed by society members giving talks and demonstrating telescopes to some 65 members of the public.

The 'So, Santa left you a telescope' event was held on the 29 December 2023 at the observatory. Members of the public were invited to bring along telescopes given as presents or that they may need help setting up and using. This year saw us help some 30 people with 10 telescopes and many questions and queries answered. Another welcome return was made to the Rotherham event, 'Planets in the Park' at Clifton Park in February 2023. This long running event was cancelled over the previous two years and its popularity was clearly shown with some 150 members of the public turning out to use the telescopes and binoculars to view the Moon, Mars, and Jupiter. In addition, five telescope owners used the opportunity to receive help with setting up.

Given its success for our meeting programme we put our Community Access events at the observatory on the Eventbrite ticketing system; all the dates were sold out. This enabled us to strengthen our refund policy, ticket holders had to pay in advance, and without a valid reason for cancellation no refunds were issued, this has addressed a long-standing issue with our previous pay at the event policy been plagued by "no shows" on the night.

The income derived for the Community Access events via Eventbrite was as follows

- 30 September 2022: (17 Adult, 3 Junior) £92.50
- 28 October 2022: (16 Adult, 4 Junior) £90.00
- 25 November 2022: (14 Adult, 6 Junior) £85.00
- 27 January 2023: (6 Adult, 1 Junior) £32.50 (plus £55 not through Eventbrite)
- 24 February 2023: (15 Adult, 5 Junior) £87.50
- 24 March 2023: (15 Adult, 5 Junior) £87.50

The "Planets in the Park" event was also placed on Eventbrite with tickets being free. The event was also advertised within Clifton Park and by the "Friends of Clifton Park". Our Eventbrite page took 168 "sales" of these free tickets!

The 28 December 2022 Event "So Santa Brought You a Telescope was not placed on Eventbrite but still was well attended by the public.

An event in conjunction with RSPB Old Moor held on 1 October 2022 was well attended but ticketing was handled by the RSPB. A further event scheduled for 25 March 2023 was cancelled due to illness and unavailability of members.

In total some 530 members of the public engaged in our Community Access and Outreach events.

Accommodation

In our report for the year ended 31 March 2013 we identified as a major risk the long-term future of our accommodation at Swinton Working Men's Club. In the past year the operators, Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. had built up a substantial debt and the club has been sold to a property developer. At the date of this report, we continue to have access to our meeting room on the terms previously agreed. We would be foolish not to realise that without a dramatic, and sadly unlikely, turnaround in the clubs fortunes the new owner will close the club and redevelop it or the site.

Several alternative venues have been investigated over the years, to date, none has offered quality, dedicated alternative accommodation. The trustees invite suggestions for alternative accommodation from all members and urge them to keep a keen lookout for possible venues.

Financial Review

Financial Performance

Detailed accounts can be found on page 5. It should be noted that Covid-19 restrictions mean that the comparison with previous years is at best difficult and at worst meaningless.

Income

There is a increase income under the Admin & General heading due to a small increase in the interest paid on our Virgin Money account and the sale of additional keysets for the observatory.

With our Community Access Programme and Public Outreach activities resuming following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions these two heading show welcome incomes on £882 and £198 respectively having been zero for the previous two years. The level of interest and enthusiasm shown by the public for these programmes and the introduction of advance ticket sales online will hopefully see these income streams remain stable in coming years.

Donations show a marked year-on-year increase of some 46% to £1,913. We are particularly grateful to our former member and good friend Joan Lauanders for her bequest of £1,000 which was received in the period of this report.

There is a significant increase of nearly 44% in income from Subscriptions and Fees to £3,145 this is due to increased attendance and online ticket sales.

Expenditure

Administration and General expenditure had dropped as SBC Ltd. no longer charge membership fees.

Guest speaker expenses are slightly higher compared the previous year (£230 compared to £185) though this should not be too surprising since the number of guest speakers is markedly higher than pre-pandemic and with the return of some speakers attending in-person rather than online and incurring travel expenses.

Meeting room expenditure is

Equipment purchased to enable online meetings accounts for the bulk of Meeting Room expenditure which is little changed at £1,115 compared to £1,198 in the previous year.

Observatory development again shows a marked increase (£161 to £546) due mainly to the work to install new locks at the observatory and cutting of keys for members, in addition a new projector was purchased for use at the observatory.

Observatory Operating Expenditure has fallen by some £305 to £1,171; this is due to rebates on non-Domestic rates from Rotherham Borough Council and a refund for overpayment from E-On.

Gifts and Support in Kind

In assessing the finances and assets of the society it must be noted that many members and trustees give a great deal of support in kind. Many purchases are made, and the payment never claimed back; for example, printing and postage costs, stall fees at events, and web hosting have all been paid for by members, but the cost not claimed despite such a claim being perfectly legitimate.

Members also give generously of their time; without the many hours given to preparing and delivering talks, running community access and outreach events, and managing the society its growth and success could not be achieved.

The trustees wish to place on record their recognition of and gratitude for these contributions.

Funds Materially in Deficit

The Society had no funds in material deficit as of 31 March 2023.

Major Risks

In our Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2014 we identified a single major risk relating to our accommodation at Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. It must be recognized that Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. is operating in a very difficult market and its recent change of ownership means our use of the rented accommodation it provides must be considered a high risk to the society. There is a danger of an unsustainable rise in our operating costs in the short-to-medium term if suitable alternative accommodation and possibly storage space had to be rented.

Financial Management and Reserves Policies

The Society has a Financial Management Policy which meets the requirements of the Charities Act 2011, the Charity Commission guidelines "Internal Financial Controls for Charities" and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice (Revised 2005)".

The General Fund is unrestricted and is used for the day-to-day operation of the Society.

Reserves are held without any exposure to the stock market.

The Society operates with an unrestricted reserve at a level set by the trustees; currently this is £5,000 which equated to approximately 24 months running costs. The reserve is held to allow the Society to offset fluctuations in income receipts and to provide for contingencies.

On 31 March 2023, the General Fund had a balance £36,595 (compared to £33,676 at the same date last year).

Whilst the current unrestricted fund level is above the reserve, we feel it is prudent in the current economic climate; maintaining a substantial reserve will better allow the Society to meet the funding challenges which the wider economic situation may impose. We are also mindful that the long-term future of Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. is difficult to guarantee and must be prepared to seek alternative accommodation, possibly at short notice.

Approved and adopted by a meeting of the Trustees and Executive Committee on 10 May 2023 and signed on their behalf,



Leslie H. Marsden FRAS
Chairman

Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2023

Receipts & Payments Account

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds	Last Year
	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £
Receipts				
Admin. & General	98	–	98	60
Community Access Programme	882	–	882	–
Donations	1,913	–	1,913	1,310
Fundraising Income	111	–	111	147
Public Outreach	198	–	198	–
Subscriptions & Fees	3,145	–	3,145	2,187
Total Receipts	6,346	–	6,346	3,704
Payments				
Admin. & General	35	–	35	95
Fundraising Expenditure	40	–	40	60
Guest Speakers	230	–	230	185
Meeting Room	1,115	–	1,115	1,198
Observatory Development	546	–	546	37
Observatory Operating Costs	1,171	–	1,171	1,476
Subscriptions	290	–	290	73
Total Payments	3,427	–	3,427	3,124
Net of receipts/(payments)	2,919	–	2,919	580
Transfers between funds	–	–	–	–
Cash funds last year end	33,676	–	33,676	33,096
Cash funds this year end	36,595	–	36,595	33,676

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

Cash Assets

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £
NatWest Current	5,732	–	5,732
<i>Add: Cheques not cleared at bank</i>	–	–	–
NatWest Savings (Closed)	–	–	–
NatWest Transfer Account	–	–	–
Virgin Charity Account	30,816	–	30,816
Petty Cash	47	–	47
PayPal	–	–	–
Total Cash Funds	36,595	–	36,595

Other Assets held for functional use

All assets shown belong to the Unrestricted (General) Fund

Observatory building and members' key sets.	54,600
Observatory Land (purchased 2017)	250
Paramount ME Robotic Telescope System	6,850
Takahashi TOA 130 wide-field telescope	3,710
Celestron C14 Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope	3,500
Focuser TCF-3 w/ Paramount Wiring Kit	1,400
Takahashi 50mm Eyepiece	355
2x Takahashi 2" Diagonal	600
Baader Hyperion 68° Eyepiece Set consisting of seven focal lengths (5, 8, 10, 13, 17, 21, 24 mm), incl. Eyepiece case	604
2x Personal Computers	1,000
Data Projector – Observatory Use	799
Data Projector – Outreach Use	400
ZWO ASI 071MC Pro (16-megapixel cooled colour camera)	1,400
<i>Solar Max Telescope (purchased June 2003)</i>	
H-alpha filter	3,154
Williams Optics 80mm Zenithstar 2	648
Eyepiece set for Solar Max	246
Orion optics field tripod	289
GPDX Mount	695
Sky Sensor 2000	859
Dovetail plate and counterweight	54
<i>Meeting Room (Rented) Contents</i>	
Optoma EH415e Video Projector & accessories (purchased 2016)	1,037
Phillips Data Projector (purchased 2000)	3,500
Overhead projector (purchased 1996)	300
Kodak Slide Projector (purchased 1996)	1,300
Panasonic AG7350 SVHS video recorder (s/h price)	1,000
DVD Player	60
Amplifier	20
Furnishings (purchased 1999)	500
<i>Library</i>	
Books, DVDs, videos, CD-ROMs; all in good condition (items of varying age)	2,600
Telescope 76.2 1250mm + 3 eyepieces & tripod	100
Tasco Refractor Telescope (9TE-5)	50
Dell Remote control keyboard	30
Meade LXD 55F/U 5" Refractor Telescope	150
Canon EOS 350D Digital SLR Camera	200
<i>Sale Items for Fundraising</i>	
Books – assorted stock	220
<i>Phil Turner Legacy</i>	
Telescope – 14-inch Dobsonian	1,600
Telescope – 5" Celestron "Go to" Telescope	700
Telescope – Coronado PST 40mm	479
Telescope – Orion Optics 5" Reflecting Telescope	300
Binoculars – Helios	200
Assorted Eyepieces, filters and tripods (no item over £75)	450
	95,605

Notes to the Accounts

Restricted Funds

The society is currently operating with no restricted funds.

Trustees' Expenses

No expenses were paid to any of the Trustees during the year except to reimburse them for purchases made on behalf of the Society.

Trustees' Indemnity Insurance

No charitable funds have been used to purchase insurance to indemnify the Trustees against the consequences of any neglect or default on their part.

Accounting Policies

Section 133 of the Charities Act 2011 permits a charity to prepare a receipts and payments account and a statement of assets and liabilities where gross income in the financial year does not exceed £250,000, therefore receipts and payments accounts, and a statement of assets and liabilities has been prepared and presented for the year ended 31 March 2023; this is consistent with previous years.

Bank Interest is included in the Admin & General category.

All Income, including grants and investment income is recorded when received.

All Expenditure is recorded when paid.

Gift aid reclaimable on donations is included in the amounts of income once received.

Basis of Valuations

Valuations have been provided for assets held for functional use, where possible the brand-new purchase price/replacement cost is given. If this is not readily available a second-hand purchase price is given.

Independent Scrutiny

In the year ended 31 March 2023 gross income did not exceed £25,000 and therefore, in accordance with the sections 144 & 145 of the Charities Act 2011 no audit or independent examination is required, and no such scrutiny requirement is imposed by the Society's governing document.

Cheques not cleared at bank on 31 March 2023

On 31 March 2023, there were no cheques issued by the society which had not been presented at the bank, for comparison, on 31 March 2022 there were no cheques issued by the society which had not cleared at the bank.

Approved and adopted at a meeting of the Trustees and Executive Committee on 10 May 2023 and signed on their behalf.



Leslie H. Marsden FRAS
Chairman

Reference and Administrative Details

Charity Name

The Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society which is also known as MSAS.

Charity Number

Registered Charity in England & Wales, N^o.1064103

Principal Address

147 Queen Street
Swinton
Mexborough
South Yorkshire
S64 8NG

Charity Trustees as of 31 March 2023

Mr Leslie Holmes Marsden	<i>Chairman</i>
Mr Shaun O'Dell	<i>Secretary</i>
Mr Michael Kerry Collinson	<i>Treasurer</i>
Mr Roy Gunson	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Mr Glenn Michael John Marsden	<i>IT Officer</i>
Mr Anthony John Morris	<i>Curator of Instruments & Observatory</i>
Mr Stephen Taylor	<i>Programme Co-ordinator</i>
Mr Kristian Keith Hudson-Lee	<i>Observations Officer</i>
Mr Edward Bothamley	<i>Librarian</i>
Mr Philip John Muffett	<i>Committee Member</i>
Mr Paul D'Silva	<i>Committee Member</i>
Mr Thomas Peter Wade	<i>Committee Member</i>

Patrons as of 31 March 2023

Dr Allan Chapman	<i>Patron & Honorary President</i>
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Advisors

Banking	National Westminster Bank PLC. Bank Street Mexborough South Yorkshire S64 9QE	Virgin Money Jubilee House Gosforth Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 4PL
Insurance Broker and Underwriter	Access Insurance Services 50 Chapel View South Croydon Surrey CR2 7LF	Ansvar Insurance Company Ltd. Ansvar House St. Leonards Road Eastbourne East Sussex BN21 3UR

Structure, Governance, and Management

Governing Document and Constitution



The Society is an unincorporated association and is governed by a constitution adopted August 1996 and last amended 23 May 2013; this is available from our website at msas.org.uk/about/constitution-and-rules.

The Society is run entirely by its members who pay an annual membership subscription and are not eligible for reimbursement of any out-of-pocket expenses. As of 31 March 2023, the Society had a membership of 35.

Trustee Selection and Management

The Society is managed by an Executive Committee which consists of all the appointed trustees. Several of the trustees also hold offices within the society, these officers are noted in the list of current trustees above.

The Executive Committee meets typically once per month.

At each meeting, the Treasurer presents the latest accounts, these are reviewed against budgets and forecasts; spending is discussed and approved. Officers may authorise some spending, between meetings, within set limits but must ensure such spending is reported at the next meeting.

The meetings also offer a forum to review recent activities within our programme and to plan forthcoming events. Correspondence and applications for membership received are considered, in addition, officers report on their areas of responsibility. Further *ad hoc* meetings are called if required, for example to plan and manage special events or projects.

The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts are approved by the trustees and presented to the members at the Annual General Meeting.

Related Organisations



The Society is a member of the Federation of Astronomical Societies (FAS), a national body established to promote co-operation between astronomical societies and provide information, advice to and advocacy for its members; for further information, see the FAS website www.fedastro.org.uk/fas.

A trustee of Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society, Shaun O'Dell, has in the year to 31 March 2023 served on the Council of the FAS; all FAS Council members are drawn from the Federation's member societies.

The Society made a subscription payment to the FAS of £25 in the year and purchased additional Public Liability Insurance, to cover events held away from the Observatory and meeting room, as part of a group scheme at a cost of £28.

The Society's meeting room is a rented room in the Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. (formerly Swinton Working Men's Club & Institute). Room rent was paid in the amount of £1,080 (£90 per calendar month).

Conflicts of Interest

The society employs the services of Safron Electrical Safety to provide security, fire safety, and electrical services to the J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory. Mr Kristian Hudson-Lee is both a trustee of the society and owner of Safron Electrical Safety. Mr Hudson-Lee is asked to withdraw from any trustee meeting whilst the services of Safron Electrical Safety are being discussed.

The trustees feel the prices charged by Safron Electrical Safety are competitive and the society benefits from having the work carried out by someone who has great familiarity with the observatory and its systems and who has unsupervised building access.

There have been no payments made to Safron Electrical Safety in the period of this report.

Objectives and Activities

Charitable Objects

The object of the Society as set out in our Constitution is the advancement of education for the public benefit in astronomy and its associated sciences.

The Society aims to promote astronomy as a recreational activity for its own sake but also aims to promote public awareness and understanding of science and the scientific method. A scientifically literate community is, in our view vital, in the modern world.

Public Benefit Statement

The trustees of Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society confirm that they have complied with their duty under section 17 (5) of the Charities Act 2011 to have regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and that the public benefit requirement has informed the activities of the Society in the year to 31 March 2023.

In evaluating public benefit, the trustees note that membership of the society is open to all who share an interest in astronomy and its associated sciences. Whilst we would encourage those with interest to join our ranks, we also strive to make our services and facilities available to non-members and ensure that restrictions placed on that availability are both necessary and reasonable. Our meeting programme for example is open to all whilst public access to the observatory or solar telescope is only available when supervised by the society; this is to protect both public safety and our assets. A society member, once suitably trained, may choose to use the observatory at any time.

Summary of Main Activities

The core activities of the Society are:

- Delivery of a weekly meeting programme covering a wide range of topics related to astronomy and its associated sciences
- Developing and maintaining the J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory
- Offering a Community Access Programme at the J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory
- Providing an Outreach Programme within the local area
- Offering support and advice to the public on matters related to astronomy.


Our philosophy is to offer access to all regardless of personal circumstances, race, gender, ability, or faith. The Society operates mainly in South Yorkshire however visitors from further afield are always welcome. The programme of weekly meetings is open to all, although disabled access to our meeting room is, sadly, limited.

Our Community Access Programme opens the J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory to give supervised access to the public and to organised groups such as schools, Scouts, and Round Table. Disabled access to the observatory is limited as the telescopes are on the first floor however, we do have facilities to take portable instruments outside to visitors who are unable to access the building.

With our Outreach activities, we take solar telescopes out to fetes and galas or to public spaces such as country parks. In recent years, we have increasingly worked in partnership with other organisations and venues in our community, this helps us to reach a wider audience.

Fees are charged for these services, but these are kept at a low level, concession rates do not apply as the full fee is small and the administrative overheads of concession rates would be disproportionate.

Approved and adopted at a meeting of the Trustees and Executive Committee on 10 May 2023 and signed on their behalf.



Leslie H. Marsden FRAS
Chairman