



MEXBOROUGH & SWINTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Annual Report & Statement of Accounts

For the year to 31 March 2024

Available online

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Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024.....	1
Achievements and Performance	1
Meeting Programme	1
Membership.....	1
Newsletter	1
J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory	1
Community Access & Outreach Programmes	2
Accommodation.....	2
Financial Review	3
Financial Performance.....	3
Income.....	3
Expenditure	3
Gifts and Support in Kind.....	3
Funds Materially in Deficit.....	3
Major Risks.....	4
Financial Management and Reserves Policies.....	4
Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2024	5
Receipts & Payments Account	5
Statement of Assets and Liabilities.....	5
Notes to the Accounts	7
Reference and Administrative Details	8
Charity Name.....	8
Charity Number	8
Principal Address.....	8
Charity Trustees as of 31 March 2024	8
Patrons as of 31 March 2024.....	8
Advisors.....	8
Structure, Governance, and Management.....	9
Governing Document and Constitution	9
Trustee Selection and Management	9
Related Organisations	9
Conflicts of Interest.....	9
Objectives and Activities	10
Charitable Objects	10
Public Benefit Statement	10
Summary of Main Activities.....	10

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees of Mexborough & Swinton Astronomical Society are pleased to present their report and accounts for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Achievements and Performance

Meeting Programme

Our weekly meeting programme has continued to deliver across a wide range of topics in astronomy and its associated sciences and levels of experience; we place on record our gratitude to all our speakers.

Membership

The society had a membership of 38 as of 31 March 2024.

Newsletter

11 editions of the society newsletter "The Messenger" were issued and distributed by email. All members with active emails are sent a copy.

J.A. Jones Hooper Observatory

The main project for the year was to thoroughly clean the outside of the observatory dome and shutters. This was accomplished by using a jet washer, subsequent inspection revealed that the underlying paint was mostly in a very good condition. Where rust was found it was treated and painted as needed. Some metal sheets were replaced on the shutter overhang and painted. This was accomplished over multiple weekends. The society and curator extend our thanks to all those who assisted with this sometimes very dirty task.

Throughout the year the observatory grounds have been maintained by a small team of people, this has kept the site in a good state of repair, which has proved to be very useful for later developments.

The reliability of the equipment in the observatory has taken a dip over the year. We have experienced tracking and pointing difficulties with the Vixen GPDX mount. This has been repaired and serviced and there has been no repeat of the issues so far. Of more concern was the failure of the Software Bisque Paramount ME mount. This failure rendered the mount totally unusable. Investigation revealed the main circuit board to be at fault. The appropriate component level repairs were undertaken by the curator, and these brought the paramount back to life. A full calibration run has been undertaken with good success. The main circuit board is end-of-life, and no like-for-like replacement is available. Whilst most components could be replaced there are some which are custom to Software Bisque and are thus unobtainable. The trustees agreed to put the society on an upgrade waiting list. The expected price of a new control board is expected to be in the range of £1,500 to £2,000.

A minor niggle with the main computers 60Khz time signal reception failing has been mitigated by repositioning of the receiver.

During September 2023 the septic tank full alarm was activated, Rotherham Council were tasked to empty it which happened within a few days of the order being placed.

Also during September, the Mexborough and District Amateur Radio Society used the observatory grounds and toilet facilities, the site and facilities were left in good state.

The difficulties related to our club room at the Swinton Bottom Club are described elsewhere in this document however these difficulties had an impact regarding to the total utilisation of the observatory and its storage capabilities. The most important audio-visual equipment was moved from our club room in December 2023 and set up in the observatory presentation room. Extra shelving was installed in the control room to allow the most useful books to be moved from the club room to the observatory control room. More shelving and brackets have been purchased to extend our shelf storage. Professor Parkinsons space instrumentation cabinet and instruments has also been moved to the presentation room.

To allow more society property from the club room to be housed at the observatory a deep tidy has been undertaken and items that were taking up space but had no immediate or foreseeable use were removed. This will need to be undertaken again soon.

External LED strip lights were specified by Mr Kris Hudson-Lee these were purchased installed under the soffit board. The LED lights illuminate some of the site and car park. They make it safer for members and visitors to use the observatory grounds at night.

From December 2023 observatory is now being used for weekly meetings and monthly executive committee meetings. The building has stood up very well, however the observatory's grass covered car park has become very muddy and difficult to traverse. This will need to be mitigated in the coming year.

The society and curator thanks all those who have assisted or undertaken various tasks during the year at the observatory.

Community Access & Outreach Programmes

The year was the first full season since the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were fully lifted and the Society offered full Community Access and Outreach programmes. As in previous years we opened the observatory to community groups such as Scouts, Guides and other organisations. We had ten visits to the J A Jones Observatory throughout the year welcoming over 190 visitors, including the Sheffield and Peak District Walking Group who happened on the observatory during one of their hikes. Unfortunately, several of the nights were poor due to the weather but the visitors were impressed with a tour of the dome and a 'planetarium' showing what they may have seen on a better night. There were also six Public Viewing Evenings (PVEs) when individuals can visit the observatory and can use the equipment. Over the six events we had 114 visitors, a 95% take up rate.

During the summer months the observatory was used for two of the four 'Solar Sunday' events allowing visitors to view the Sun safely. Visitors were able to use telescopes with white light, Hydrogen- α and Calcium-K filters to view sunspots, prominences and other features of the Sun. In addition, we visited RSPB Old Moor for an additional two 'Solar Sundays' in May and August attracting large groups of visitors.

The public was invited to the observatory on the 28 December 2023 for another edition of the popular event 'So, Santa left you a Telescope' at which anyone who has a telescope and needs help to use it can bring it along and society members help to set it up, align it and give some basic instructions to get the owners on their observing path. This year we helped over 38 people with 12 telescopes.

Further afield we were invited by the staff of Wentworth Woodhouse - the former home of the Dukes Fitzwilliam – in the newly refurbished Camellia House. The society provided talks, displays and a wide range of telescopes and binoculars to take advantage of the fair observing conditions.

The poor weather continued throughout the year and our regular visits to RSPB Old Moor were severely disrupted with a postponement, followed by a damp visit in December.

February saw the return of 'Planets in the Park' at Clifton Park, Rotherham, an event that has been running for well over a decade. Besides talks and displays there was the opportunity to once again bring along a telescope and obtain help from the members on how to use it. During the evening members demonstrated observing with their own equipment to well over 80 people and received much positive feedback on our social media sites.

The trustees would like to thank all the members for supporting these efforts throughout the year.

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 our report for the year ended 31 March 2023 we reported that the operators, Swinton Bottom Club Ltd. had built up a substantial debt and the club has been sold to a property developer.

In the year to 31 March 2024 our weekly meeting programme was relocated to JA Jones Hooper Observatory whilst alternative venues were investigated. At the March 2024 meeting of the Executive Committee the trustees took the decision to move our weekly meetings to John the Baptist Community centre, Mexborough. It is hoped to complete the move early in the coming financial year.

Financial Review

Financial Performance

Detailed accounts can be found on page 5.

Income

There is a marked increase income under the Admin & General heading due moving our reserve from a Virgin Money account (now closed) to NatWest, the higher interest rate having a very positive impact.

With our Community Access Programme and Public Outreach enjoying a full year income from both shows a year-on-year increase. Community Access Programme income was up 33% to £1,176 (£882 in the previous year) and Public Outreach rose from £198 to £250, a 26% increase.

Donations show a marked year-on-year fall of some 91% to £171 from £1,913. £1,000 of the previous year's income was the bequest of Joan Launders.

There is a slight increase of 4% in income from Subscriptions and Fees to £3,299 (3,145) this is due to increased attendance and online ticket sales.

Expenditure

Guest speaker expenses are slightly higher compared the previous year (£262 compared to £230)..

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 risen by some £729 to £1,900; this is driven by increased use, work parties at the observatory, and the relocation of our meeting programme.

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 2024.

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 2024, the General Fund had a balance £37,585 (compared to £36,595 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 our alternate accommodation

Approved and adopted by a meeting of the Trustees and Executive Committee on 17 July 2024 and signed on their behalf,



Leslie H. Marsden FRAS
Chairman

Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2024

Receipts & Payments Account

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds	Last Year
	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £
Receipts				
Admin. & General	489	-	489	98
Community Access Programme	1,176	-	1,176	882
Donations	171	-	171	1,913
Fundraising Income	115	-	115	111
Public Outreach	250	-	250	198
Subscriptions & Fees	3,299	-	3,299	3,145
Total Receipts	5,501	-	5,501	6,346
Payments				
Admin. & General	35	-	35	35
Fundraising Expenditure	454	-	454	40
Guest Speakers	262	-	262	230
Meeting Room	1,169	-	1,169	1,115
Observatory Development	156	-	156	546
Observatory Operating Costs	1,900	-	1,900	1,171
Subscriptions	534	-	534	290
Total Payments	4,511	-	4,511	3,124
Net of receipts/(payments)	990	-	990	2,919
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
Cash funds last year end	36,595	-	36,595	33,676
Cash funds this year end	37,585	-	37,585	36,595

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

Cash Assets

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £
NatWest Current	856	-	5,732
<i>Add: Cheques not cleared at bank</i>	-	-	-
NatWest Savings	36,650	-	36,650
NatWest Transfer Account	-	-	-
Virgin Charity Account (Closed)	-	-	-
Petty Cash	80	-	47
PayPal	-	-	-
Total Cash Funds	37,585	-	37,585

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 2024 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 17 July 2024 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°.1064103

Principal Address

147 Queen Street
Swinton
Mexborough
South Yorkshire
S64 8NG

Charity Trustees as of 31 March 2024

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 Laurence Horrocks-Barlow	<i>Programme Co-ordinator</i>
Mr Kristian Keith Hudson-Lee	<i>Observations Officer</i>
Mr Edward Bothamley	<i>Librarian</i>
Mr Thomas Peter Wade	<i>Fundraising Officer</i>
Mr Philip John Muffett	<i>Committee Member</i>
Mr Paul D'Silva	<i>Committee Member</i>
Mr Stephen Taylor	<i>Committee Member</i>

Patrons as of 31 March 2024

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	
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 2024.

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 17 July 2024 and signed on their behalf.



Leslie H. Marsden FRAS
Chairman