

Secretary's Report 2020

"So utterly at variance is Destiny with all the little plans of men."

H.G.Wells

The Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) saw to it that 2020 was very much *not* business as usual for EAS, and we entered National Lockdown just a couple of weeks after our March meeting. Nobody knew how long it was going to last and EAS went 'on-hold', cancelling meetings on a month-by-month basis, until by mid-Summer it became apparent that things were not going to return to normal in the foreseeable future, so we realised that we needed to come up with a Plan B.

Committee

The Committee met just three times in 2020, with the only physical meeting being in January, and the July and November meetings being held via *Zoom*. Committee members at the start of the year were: Anita King (Chair), Stephen [REDACTED] (Secretary), Susan Stangroom (Treasurer), Shirish Phade (Registrar), Peter Scott (Webmaster), Paul Evans (MGO Project Manager), Richard Etherington (outgoing Treasurer), Ron Canham and Steve Roebuck. At the end of the year we said a sad goodbye to Steve Roebuck, who is taking a break from the Committee for personal reasons, and we welcomed in his place John Davey who is Editor of *Janus*. We were honoured by a guest attendance from Ron Johnson at our January meeting, who came to advise the Committee on matters relating to the building of the Maurice Gavin Observatory (MGO).

Online Activity

With the prospect of physical meetings seeming unlikely during the second half of 2020, we decided to try using *Zoom* to hold some sort of meeting. In our October *Zoom* meeting we welcomed Bob Mizon who logged-in to deliver a talk on Astrophotographers, but due to technical problems we lost him halfway through and we had to abandon the meeting. In November however, we had rather more success when Prof. Peter Doel from UCL logged-in to give a talk on his work with the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, which was well-received by the 31 members that attended the virtual meeting. Bob Mizon returns in December for a second attempt at his talk, and we thank him for that.

It quickly became obvious that our online content was going to become very important for keeping our members engaged with the Society going forward, so I have spent a considerable amount of time working with our social media channels this year. Facebook is by far the most popular of our channels, with a following of 240+ people and good post reach and engagement. Instagram is relatively new for us, but is popular with a following of 140, most of whom are not members. Our Twitter account has 182 followers, though is less popular, and has poor rates of post engagement, but we keep it open because we are linked to most of the UK's astrosocs through Twitter.

New for 2020, was our YouTube channel, which I set up and launched in the second half of the year. I have posted a range of videos and presentations on the channel, including the archive film of the building of our first observatory back in the 1970s, which a number of members have been keen to see. Uptake has been slow, with only a handful of subscribers, and low viewing figures, but I remain hopeful that the channel's popularity will grow, as members get used to using it.

Policies

At the 2019 AGM I spoke about the need for the Society to develop a set of Policy Documents going forward, and although I paused this work during the Lockdown, I have now returned to it, and have written a brand new document entitled "*Doing the Right Thing - All Our Policies in One Document*", which I think is a progressive and agile way for us to communicate our policies for our day-to-day operations. This document has yet to be ratified by the Committee, but hopefully we will be in a position to publish it in early 2021.

Archives

In the last couple of months, I have taken on the huge and important task of preserving the Society's archives. This involves digitising 50 years' worth of documentation for electronic storage and off-site backup, so that they will be safely preserved for the future. Among these documents are for example, is the first ever minute book, which contains the minutes for the inaugural meeting in October 1966, and 268 historic issues of *Janus*, dating back to the early 1970s. These are incredibly precious and important documents that record the entire history of our Society, and as well as preserving them, I hope that by digitising them, we will be able to share some of their content with our members, to make them more aware and proud of the history of our Society.

The Year Ahead and Future-Proofing

Little did I know when I gave my report at the 2019 AGM and mentioned the need for future-proofing, that in just a few months time the worst-case scenario would actually happen, and before we had come up with a future-proofing strategy! COVID is not going away any time soon, and it has made us all acutely aware of how vulnerable our daily lives are to disruption from pandemic diseases and other global catastrophes.

More than ever now, we need to think carefully about the future, and how we will ensure continuity of service delivery to our membership going forward, and this is something that I will be working on with the Committee over the coming year. But it is not just about service delivery - a large number of our members also depend on the Society for social interaction and companionship, and the loss of public meetings is likely to have a devastating effect on their wellbeing.

In the future, we will need to consider the options for socially distanced meetings and observing sessions, as well as increased resilience through better use of our *WhatsApp* group and *Zoom* to overcome this problem. I would like to encourage all of our members to contribute to our Social Media, YouTube channel and Zoom meetings, with your observations, presentations

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about projects that you are working on, equipment reviews or anything else that you think might be of interest to our members. I would also like to thank John Davey for his continuing hard work putting together *Janus* each month, and to urge our members to download it from our website and read it each month, because it is so very important for keeping people informed and motivated during these difficult times.

We have no idea what the future holds for 2021, but all of us who are involved in the running of EAS are determined that we will keep the Society running. We are still learning how to do that in the “New World”, and our attempts may seem a little clumsy at the moment, but please be patient; we will get better at it.

I wish everyone a healthy and happy Christmas and New Year, and very much look forward to the day when we can all get back together again.

Stephen

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