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A REPORT

THE AAA's OPEN EVENING, held at 7.30pm on FRIDAY 27 JANUARY 2017

at THE ATHENAEUM, BURY ST EDMUNDS

1. The Reading Room and Lounge were booked; the Programme agreed; and the Publicity was out, thanks to the East Anglian Daily Times, the Mercury, the Bury Free Press, our poster producers and deliverers, and the AAA website (www.3a.org.uk)

Inside the Athenaeum's Reading Room, a band of AAA Members had erected borrowed display boards full of astrophotographs and information about the AAA and the Athenaeum's Telescope and Observatory; there was a small tribute to Mark Savin, a former member; Sneezum's had put up an interesting astronomy display with telescopes, books and information; the Orwell Astronomical Society also gave their support with yet more displays and optical equipment; the refreshment table was ready, laid out with Starbuck's donated card cups and sleeves for coffee, tea, and juice, - and there were biscuits! The AAA's publicity leaflets and Membership Forms were at the ready.

In the Lounge, the speakers were waiting with a screen and projectors in place and, optimistically, seventy chairs had been put out.

But after all this, had we remembered everything? and would anyone come?

Two AAA members sat patiently by the door, ready to welcome our guests

And gradually they filtered in,..... - until the seventy seats were filled and more chairs were requested. By the end there were almost eighty people there, an overwhelming, unexpected and most encouraging response to our very first Open Evening.

After the Welcome, the ubiquitous talk about Fire Exits and Toilets, and an oversight of the evening's programme,-

2. Dr. Richard Young, the AAA's director, gave **An Introduction to the AAA**,

As the founder of the AAA, Richard explained why he had chosen to start an astronomy association in the most light-polluted part of Bury. On top of the Athenaeum there is a beautifully preserved Victorian Observatory complete with telescope, which was opened in 1860. It now is part of Bury's heritage.

Even older is the Athenaeum Club, also part of the culture of the town. Wishing to renovate the Observatory and bringing it again to the public's attention, the Club invited Richard to be its astronomy advisor, to write a proposal for restoring the telescope, and then to develop an astronomy association. However, the Club was advised that an astronomy group should be developed before commencing the restoration, and this has led to the current state of play.

The Restoration Project now is moving forward slowly, being well supported by the Town and Borough Councils. The Astronomy Association is growing fast and thriving, and has moved from meeting at Richard's home to meeting fortnightly in the Walled Garden at Nowton Park. Part of the aim of the Association is to bring astronomy to the public, and this evening is the first of what is hoped will become a series of open access events.

This evening's programme includes two talks about what can be seen in the night sky and how to photograph it, given by two of our Members, Brian Shepherd and David Murton, the latter being also the chairman of the Orwell Astronomical Society in Ipswich.

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We welcome Sneezum's who have contributed to the exhibition. Also welcome is the customer who, being by chance in their shop at the time when these arrangements were being discussed, very kindly is donating two telescopes, part of a relative's legacy, to the AAA. The AAA is most grateful for this generous gift. The display includes Members' photography and also a small tribute to Mark Savin, a keen and enthusiastic member and astrophotographer, who sadly passed away in December. The AAA is pleased to welcome his widow and his business co-director, both of whom have been able to come to this evening's meeting.

Richard concluded by thanking the AAA's website designer for the Association's new and comprehensive website (www.3a.org.uk) and the Secretary. Both have given much valued support.

3. Brian Shepherd, an AAA member, was the first speaker whose subject was
"An Introduction to the Night Sky".

Brian's talk told us that it all began with the Big Bang, which started with an atomic particle that, over the next millions, billions, of years, formed the universe as we know it today. Along the way, gas clouds were created. These in turn created elements that went on to create stars, galaxies and our solar system, in which sits our planet.

Along with the Earth there are the other planets that all have their own characteristics, none of which support life as we know it. But there is always a chance that one of them might be able to support Man in his quest to reach the stars and, of course, there are many moons that equally may be of interest to us.

Seeing many of the planets, such as Venus and Jupiter, is easily carried out with the naked eye, and knowing how to locate them in the night sky is a key skill of the amateur astronomer. In the northern hemisphere we have some key markers to aid our navigation, such as identifying The Plough, from which we can find the Pole star and move across to the constellation of Cassiopeia.

We can enhance our viewing experience through the use of optical instruments such as binoculars and telescopes, many of which can be purchased at affordable prices by modern standards. How much we wish to spend will determine the quality of instrument selected.

Suitably prepared, we can set about observing the night sky, It helps to record the conditions, such as the temperature, visibility, date and time of year, any light pollution and, most importantly what we have seen, - stars, galaxies, planets etc.

Information about what to look for and when to look for it can be found in magazines, astronomical websites, (including the AAA's www.3a.org.uk), by using a simple Planisphere, or by joining an astronomy group.

We also can photograph what we see, even with the most basic camera or mobile phone. This is a discipline in its own right and many, like the next speaker, specialise in this activity and produce magnificent photographs, examples of which may be seen in the Reading Room. Astronomy is fun, educational and for everyone to enjoy.

4. A Refreshment Break followed, during which the guests were invited to view the displays, speak with AAA Committee Members and Exhibitors, network with other guests, and enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. The Refreshment Ladies fulfilled their role with great efficiency, having anticipated a much smaller audience, catered for by the provision of three kettles. So there was much running to and fro the kitchen to replenish the water supplies! But ultimately all were served with a smile – and a drink!

5. David Murton, chairman of the Orwell Astronomy Society at Ipswich (OASI), opened the second half of the evening with his talk entitled
"Simple Milky Way and Supermoon imaging with a DSLR and tripod"

In his talk, David took us right through the process of making wonderful images with an ordinary DSLR camera. He described the Basics, the Essentials, the Lens, and the Exposure, all aiming to produce the best pictures of the night sky.

He then went on to discuss the pictures' Composition, using foreground and mosaics to create interest, depth and width.

Good pictures need to be planned in advance, and there are phone/tablet applications which can help in finding an optimum time and location for night-time photography.

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Moving On gave tips and ideas for improving the quality of the finished image, and this included the Processing which, if carefully done, can transform the final product. This can be aided by a number of programmes and tools available as Downloads.

The talk continued with many wonderful examples of David's own astrophotography, illustrating in turn the points above, interspersed with timely and more detailed reminders of what, and what not, to do.

Ideally it should have enabled us all to go home as knowledgeable and skilled astrophotographers.....

6. The evening ended where it began, with the AAA: a reminder that all that had been shared during the evening could be provided by the AAA, whether educationally or historically, as long as it has Members and Friends to support it.

So please join with us now, as the AAA's increasingly exciting journey continues to unfold. As David Murton remarked, astronomy is for everyone, at all levels, of any age, anywhere... the skies are always there for everybody.

Sincere thanks were expressed to speakers, supporters, AAA members, for help from SEBC and most of all to everyone who had supported and encouraged the AAA by their attendance.

THANK YOU ALL for enabling such a successful and enjoyable evening.

MLS for 27.1.2017