

The BAA at Astrofest

'Astrofest' is a conference and exhibition for amateur astronomers in the UK, held over two days – Friday and Saturday – every year in February at Kensington Town Hall, London. It is organised by Pole Star Publications, publishers of *Astronomy Now* magazine. The BAA has had a stand there since the event started in 1992. Attendance this year was around 4,000.

The exhibition has trade stands selling all the equipment and software an astronomer could possibly want or need. Many of the exhibitors had tempting special offers and judging by the number of people who left carrying large boxes, these went down well! Universities providing distance learning astronomy courses were well represented, as were the major publishers of astronomy books such as Cambridge University Press, Springer and Canopus Pub-



lishing. Armagh Planetarium had items for sale to interest the younger visitor. The Science and Technology Facilities Council, previously PPARC, had a range of hand-outs useful for teachers. The Webb Society, Society for Popular Astronomy and British Interplanetary Society also had their usual stands.

The conference comprised a full programme of lectures throughout both days – always very popular – featuring well-

known personalities such as Allan Chapman, David Levy and Sir Patrick Moore, who gave the final talk on Saturday. He has lost none of his appeal and the conference hall was packed to hear him.

The BAA stand is always well-positioned at the foot of the main staircase which ensures a steady flow of visitors. Although having a stand at Astrofest is expensive, it provides an opportunity to show what the BAA does and can offer to a large and receptive audience, many of whom are not members of any astronomical society, either local or national. We can meet and talk to our members, attract new ones and show the items we have for sale.

The BAA team of Jean Felles, Madeleine Crow, John Mason, Richard Flux, Peter Hudson and myself put in a lot of effort to organise and set up our stand. Before the event John booked the stand while Jean and Madeleine in the office organised transport and packed up and labelled the boxes of sales items. On Thursday every-

thing was transported to Kensington Town Hall and John, Richard, Peter and Ann unpacked the boxes and set up the stand ready for the crowds to arrive at 9am on Friday morning. Although it was hard work, it was also a lot of fun.



The next two days were hectic. During the intervals between talks, we were particularly busy. Besides those mentioned above, several other BAA and Council members helped on the stand during the two days, including Roger Pickard, Ron Johnson, Val White, Rita Whiting, David Boyd, Nick Hewitt, Sheridan Williams and Alan Dowdell. Mike Maunder signed copies of his new book *Lights in the Sky*. We gained new members, answered all sorts of questions and most important, had a laugh



Photos, from top: the BAA sales stand; Ann Davies (left) and Maddy Crow get down to work; Ann, Peter Hudson, Richard Flux and John Mason plan the display; Allan and Rachel Chapman come to visit. Next page, Ann, Rita Whiting and Richard take it all very seriously.

with friends who called to see us: Allan and Rachel Chapman, Norman Walker, Guy Hurst, Neil Bone, Mike Foulkes, Stewart

staff dismantle the stands around us. Madeleine, Ann, Nick, Rita, David and Madeleine's husband Martin helped pack and load the van.



Then it was back to Burlington House through the rush hour traffic where Peter Hingley, the RAS Librarian, had kindly stayed to help us get everything upstairs into the BAA office. Thank goodness for the new lift!

For me, it was three busy days. I met many old and new friends and re-

ally enjoyed myself, as I think did everyone else involved. The BAA made contact with many current members, signed up several new members and made many more people aware of our Association. In the process we also sold enough merchandise to make it worthwhile. I want to thank everyone who helped with running this event – and I have already started to think about next year!

Moore, Pat Barber and many more. Astrofest is a good place to meet friends, discuss shared interests, perhaps spend too much money, and have a good day out.

By 6pm on Saturday, after three days of intense activity we were all feeling very tired, but we continued trading to the last minute. Then the van driver arrived and the process of dismantling began. It is always hectic getting everything packed away in boxes and upstairs in the lift while the event

Ann Davies, Sales and Promotion

Your help is needed!

'Back to Basics' Assistant(s)

The BAA Council recently agreed that our hardworking Meetings Secretary, Hazel Collett, needs help in organising the popular and successful 'Back to Basics' meetings. These one-day meetings are intended as an introduction to basic observational astronomy, for new members and others: we try to hold two per year in different parts of the country.

It is likely that at least two Assistants will be required, one covering, say, the north and the other the south of the country. The meetings are best coordinated with a local astronomical society (AS) and so the Assistant(s) will need to liaise with them, and also with the New Members' Coordinator.

As 'Back to Basics' Assistant, you would be asked to carry out the following tasks:

- 1) In collaboration with the Meetings Secretary and Council, decide on an area in which to hold the meeting(s) and select a suitable local active AS;
- 2) Agree suitable venue(s) with the local AS;
- 3) Agree a suitable date (around the first Saturday in October and 3rd or 4th Saturday in January);
- 4) Book the venue and invite speakers

(usually Section Directors or active observers);

- 5) Discuss catering arrangements with the local AS and agree a price for this;
- 6) Ask local AS to supply a map and information about their society to go on a flyer;
- 7) Put together flyer/booking form, arrange printing of this for circulation in BAA *Journal* plus local advertising and distribution by AS;
- 8) On day of meeting ensure everything is in place and oversee proceedings.

Once a suitable local society has been found, we usually ask them to coordinate the local facilities and in this way it is hoped the new Assistant(s) will not find the position too onerous. The Meetings Secretary will, of course, generally be available to give help and guidance at each stage.

Will anyone able to help the Association in this way please contact the President at their earliest convenience. [E-mail president@britastro.org; Tel. 01568 708136]

Roger Pickard, President; Hazel Collett, Meetings Secretary