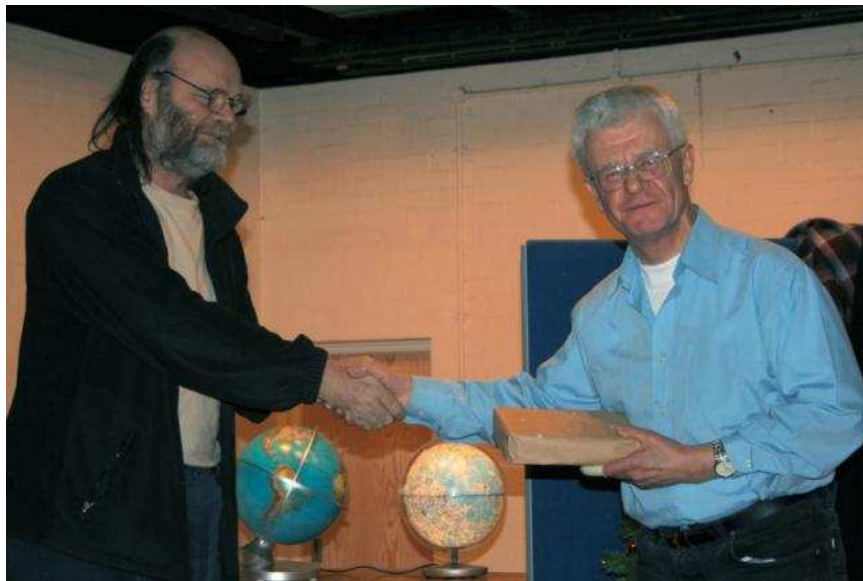


# Hermes Extra

## Newly-elected SAS Chairman RICHARD PEARCE reports:

On Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007, the Shropshire Astronomical Society (SAS) held its AGM. This evening was, however, more than just the usual AGM. **David Woodward** stood down from his role of Chairman, after almost twenty years of being involved with the organisation and running of the SAS, to enjoy a well-earned rest.

I have known David for only about three years now, but during this time, I have learnt that David has been the key driving force behind the successful development of the group. David has used his immense knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, Astronomy, to engage and enthuse the other members of the group, and through these attributes and his organisational skills has helped the SAS to thrive. David not only worked within the SAS membership to promote astronomy but also used his unique skills to introduce the wonders of the night sky to young folk outside the SAS.



**Grant Privett presents David Woodward with a collection of Space Rocks – including a Martian rock sample**

During the evening following the AGM, David entertained the 25-plus strong audience by reading selected, humorous passages from **Sir Patrick Moore's** book, "**Can You Speak Venusian?**". For this performance, David had set up a scene on stage, including a chair, a reading lamp and a Christmas tree. To add to the atmosphere, David himself wore a dressing gown and red 'Fez' hat.

After David's recitation from Sir Patrick's book, committee member **Grant Privett** presented David with a collection of meteoric materials as a token of thanks from the SAS membership.

David has now been superseded by myself as Chairman, and knowing what I do about David Woodward, I realise that his will be a very tough act to follow. Luckily, David has left me with a very conscientious and competent committee who, I hope, will help to keep me going in the correct direction.

David's influence on the SAS will be sadly missed and I am sure I am correct in saying that all the members of the group hope that David will still attend the SAS meetings on a regular basis.

Enjoy your rest, David, You have deserved it.

**Richard Pearce**



**Can you speak Venusian?**

## Grant Privett recalls:

For those of you unable to make it to the AGM, I had prepared a few words of thanks to **Dave Woodward** for when we presented the gift to him, but in the event I was tongue-tied. Give me an astronomy talk and I will go on for hours – throwing things is your best way of stopping me – but ask me to say a few words of thanks and it's like someone just slipped me three valiums with a whisky chaser. So:

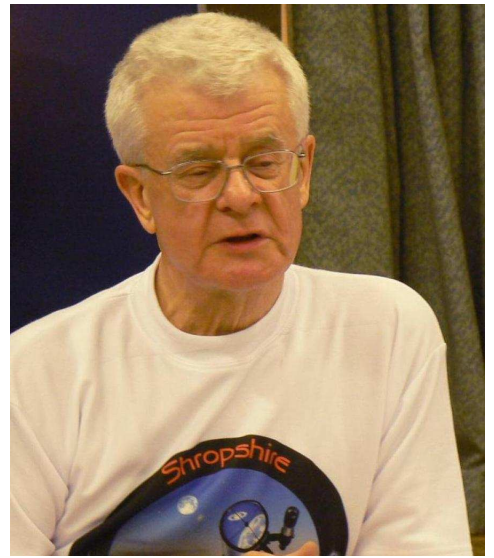
“Dave's stepped down, and it's the end of an age then. But oddly, it hasn't really seemed like one. The Society has now been around in its current form for 14 or 15 years – it depends upon whose account you listen to. But, certainly I first spoke to Dave sometime in 1992/3 and by then he was already Chairman and apart from a period when **Simon Clayton-Jones** had a bash, Dave has been at the helm ever since.

My time with the SAS started when I picked up a flyer for the Society at a talk **Patrick Moore** gave in Ludlow Assembly Rooms. I sent off the application and a few days later heard from Dave by 'phone. He had never met me before (life had been good to him up until then), and yet we chatted on the phone about astronomy, telescopes and the Society for best part of an hour. He welcomed me warmly to the Society and left me in no doubt that I was not alone and I never looked back. I knew I could go to the meetings, be able to say 'My name's Grant – I'm an astronomer' and be among friends. It was good to know that Shropshire harboured other people addicted to the night sky.

Since then, members have come and gone. Similarly, memorable events such as comets Hale-Bopp and Hyakutake, and the 1999 total eclipse are now behind us and what have we to show for it? Well, just go and look at the *SAS website* or *Hermes*. When something interesting happens overhead the SAS turns up, observes, records, spreads the word to the public and – along the way – has a lot of fun.

Many of you will also recall the Summer Socials when we single-handedly helped to avoid hosepipe bans in Shropshire. Others will remember great moments in astronomy, such as that at Keele observatory some years ago where **Billy Lee** – a previous president – was using an antique brass eyepiece on a Grubb Parsons 19" refractor. He dropped it from some height on to Dave's foot – it was impressive to see the sacrifice Dave would make for astronomy. For that matter many of you will recall Dave measuring the distance rockets flew at Summer Socials where he seemed to be offering himself for target practice.

Personally, my best memory is of Dave driving off across The Long Mynd after a very cold Leonid observing session at the Gliding Club. He set off in totally the wrong direction and spent some time driving straight at one of the ponds before sharply braking and trying again. I was grateful, as at -5°C, wading in to help pull him out was not an attractive prospect. Yet, more seriously, who can forget sharing Venus crossing the Sun's face from The Quarry in Shrewsbury, or the pock-marked face of Jupiter after Shoemaker Levy 9, or for that matter, Mars in 2005 seen from Attingham. The Society has been busy.



**David Woodward**

And in large part the credit must go to Dave. It's true the committee – which has also been blessed with a variety of faces over the years – helps, but astronomers are (being polite) nothing if not interesting people and it's fallen to Dave to have to find the middle path that keeps everyone as happy as we can without bankrupting ourselves or getting arrested. And for that we owe him thanks.

Most of you will not know it, but Dave does quite a lot of organising behind the scenes, for example the exhibition at the AGM was entirely down to Dave (for those of you who missed it, it was very good and something we should continue perhaps). Moreover he wanted to be there at 5pm to make sure this meeting went okay – though I suspect he sneaked down the pub at some point. Most of us are not even giving thought to searching for the car keys at that point. Don't get me wrong, Dave's no saint, and if you give him a pint or two and get him started on the subject of the lighting at Meole Brace you will be in no doubt. But he cares and that's about the best thing you can say about someone.

As you will all know by now, Dave has decided that for a year or so after he retires from the post he is going to keep a low profile to avoid being a damping influence on the new incumbent. But my theory is he is going to build his observatory at last, put a good chair in it and, while waiting for the sky to clear will drink *Woods Shropshire Lad*. I hope however, he will not make himself a stranger. He helped build the Society and should now be able to enjoy it.

So, for my part, and in this instance, on behalf of everyone in the Society, I would like to propose a vote of thanks to Dave and hope one or two of you will second it. And after that we can all go out and see the comet attending this auspicious occasion.”

Grant Privett



**The Old and the New – Retiring Chairman DAVID WOODWARD  
with newly-elected RICHARD PEARCE**