

12TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY

Held on Monday 10th October 2011 at 7.00 p.m. in the lecture theatre of the National Maritime Museum

- 1. Present:** Mike Dryland (Vice Chairman) and 61 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society
- 2. Apologies** were received from Lin Potter, Brian Evans, Malcolm Porter and Martin Beckford.
- 3. Matters arising:** There were no matters arising from the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 20th September 2010.
- 4. Chairman's address:**

In Lin Potter's absence due to ill health Mike Dryland, Vice Chairman, delivered a précis of the following report:

Again, the Flamsteed Astronomy Society has had an incredibly busy and successful year. I would like to thank everybody involved in helping to make it so vibrant.

Firstly I would like to mention that Rachel Harrison joined us as the new Membership manager and has been very helpful to Flamsteed in her new role. We began our 2010-2011 season with Jerry Stone talking about "How we reached the moon". It's a subject we've heard about before, but it was a lively and well told story. Jerry brought along his book, *One Small Step*, which he duly signed for enthusiastic members.

In October, Professor Ian Morison, Gresham College Professor of Astronomy, visited and gave a fascinating talk to Flamsteed, updating us on the latest SETI news. He gave his personal views on probable outcomes of ongoing research. He reviewed the possibility of life on other planets in the solar system and also amused us by recalling the first scientifically recorded ET radio signal.

In November, Dr Mike Simms talked about "To here from eternity – the extraordinary story of some ordinary Chondrite meteorites".

The Christmas party was held at the ROG site and was a successful and festive evening. Dr Lewis Dartnell joined us to talk about "Astrobiology – the Hunt for alien life". He illustrated that life on Earth has shown it can adapt to conditions which we now know also exist elsewhere in the solar system. Using the wonders of the planetarium's high technology, Lewis cleverly commenced a journey from Earth starting in Greenwich, first stop Mars!

The first lecture of the New Year was given by Dr Richard Crowther. It was a fascinating lecture on "Space debris – Danger in Orbit". He presented his talk to a virtually full house and a lively question and answer session followed.

Our February lecture was presented by Dr Carolin Crawford, an astronomer at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge. Carolin spoke about "The science and beauty of nebulae". The visual aspect of her talk was simply stunning.

In March it was a pleasure to have our old friend Gilbert Satterthwaite return to talk to Flamsteed. Gilbert is Chairman of the Society for the History of Astronomy.

He is famous for his work at Greenwich on Airy's Transit Circle. Gilbert talked passionately about being an astronomer in Greenwich in the 1950s and brought the history of the observatory to life. It was at this lecture that we said goodbye to Gloria Clifton, who retired as Senior Curator at the ROG. She was presented with a bouquet on behalf of Flamsteed. We were very sorry to see her go, but wished her well for the future.

It was an honour to have Professor Jim Al-Khalili, Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Surrey, join us in April. He spoke about "Medieval Arabic Astronomy – Filling the gap between Ptolemy and Copernicus". The lecture was based on his book "Pathfinders – The Golden Age of Arabic Science", which describes the contributions made by Arabic scientists based in Iraq, Persia and other centres of the medieval Islamic world. The audience was gripped by such a stimulating talk. Again, it was good to see an almost full house.

In May we welcomed back Dr Stuart Clark, who gave us a talk based on his recent book, "The Big Questions: The Universe". It was such a success that he sold out of his book during the post-lecture signing.

The summer season ended with a lecture from Dr Roger Hanson, who was on a visit from New Zealand. He discussed "The Evolving Universe". Roger became a chemical engineer for Big Oil after achieving his PhD from Trinity Cambridge. He believes that there is a strong connection between chemical engineering and astrophysics, hence his extensive knowledge and propensity to muse about the Universe. Roger imagines that there could be a history of universes before 'our' Big Bang! He signed copies of his book, "The Cosmic Engine" which made for another fascinating read.

During the year there have been many other events and meetings. As usual there were stargazing activities on Blackheath, Cudham, Hazelwood and Romney. Led up by Mike Meynell, assisted by Chris Mann, the viewing programme has gone from strength to strength despite some very disappointing weather. Mike reports: "Our Blackheath stargazing sessions moved to a new location in February this year, following a site survey to determine the best location with minimal street lamp glare. The new location has proved to be very successful, with around 60-70 people attending our session on Saturday 1 October. As ever, we are dependent on the weather conditions for these events, but they will continue on a regular basis.

Attendance at these sessions has been aided by our new communication channels of SMS Text Messaging and Twitter.

The SMS Text Messaging service was started on a trial basis in March, and has proved to be of great use in communicating last minute changes of plan to members. We now have 50 subscribers to this service, and intend to continue with the service in the long term.

Twitter has been in use for around 4 months. We are using this service not only as an additional tool to help us communicate events to members, but also to highlight items of interest to members, the wider astronomy community, and the general public. We currently have over 150 'followers' on Twitter and many more who view the Flamsteed 'tweets' on the main Flamsteed website."

The Solar Viewing team has been extremely active and have reported back that the general public have been very enthusiastic. The Museum especially thanked the team for all their efforts and input. Particular thanks go to Grey Liple and David Waugh for building the team and upgrading the telescope and its storage; also for giving so much time and expertise to the project.

Hare and Billet evenings were reinstated by David Waugh normally on the third Monday of each month; much to the delight of many.

During the winter, Flamsteed were able to use the 28-inch Great Equatorial telescope at the ROG on a regular basis. An added attraction was that when the weather was too bad to use the telescope (as unfortunately it frequently was), instead of calling off the session, Tony Sizer gave the participants a planetarium show instead.

In memory of our dear friend Dr John Griffiths, a plaque was attached to the HEQ-5 mount, using money raised for this from Flamsteed donations. The plaque was formally presented at a meeting in early 2011.

In April, Pat Wainwright and Lin Potter visited the Griffon Educational Observatory in El Bosque, Spain. This was the brainchild of John Griffiths and is now run by Kath Griffiths and Andy Burns. We are trying to organise a visit to the observatory, either in February or April 2012. This is an ongoing situation at the moment and more information will be available shortly.

In the past, Flamsteed had a properly written constitution in agreement with the Friends. Since the Friends were disbanded the Flamsteed has become a special interest group within the Membership department, which is a totally integrated part of the Museum. This means that there is no documented understanding between the Museum and the Flamsteed. With this in mind, a sub-committee was set up to discuss and produce a Memorandum of Understanding. We have now reached the final stage of discussions and as soon as it is completed the Agreement will be available to all of our members. Here I would very much like to thank the sub-committee led up by Mike Dryland who has done really sterling and tireless work on Flamsteed's behalf.

The biggest event of the year as far as the Museum was concerned was the opening of the Sammy Ofer Wing, the largest development in the Museum's history. The new wing includes the High Arctic exhibition, a restaurant and the new Caird Library and archive. Members were invited to a splendid party to celebrate its opening. It was a huge success.

Flamsteed continues to flourish and it would not do so without the support of the volunteers. We have a dedicated and active Committee, whose help I could not do without. I would like to thank everybody concerned for all their efforts this year. A special mention must go to Deborah McGarvey, Peter Kitcherside and Roger Geeson who not only serve the coffee, tea, nibbles and wine so efficiently at each meeting, but also do the shopping and transport the refreshments every time we meet. I am sure that all our members must feel very appreciative of their efforts. Also we must mention Chris Sutcliffe, Chris Gadsden and Roger Geeson who so ably take notes and write up reports of our lectures for the website. This is to help out Mike Dryland, who has been doing this as a sole effort for several years. Grey Liplely is part of the team and acts as back up photographer. Our thanks go also to Mike Meynell and Chris Mann for organising the Blackheath viewings, and to Mike Meynell for the launch of twitter and the text service. Again, thanks to Grey and David for the development of the solar viewing programme. Particular thanks go to Jane Bendall, the Secretary, whose skills enable us to have a full and lively programme. Behind the scenes she works continuously to ensure that all meetings are smooth and that the NMM/ROG are informed of all our activities. In addition I would like to thank Mike Dryland, the Vice Chair, for his invaluable contributions, here too numerous to mention! We look forward to the new 2011-2012 season and of course the Olympic Games in the park.

Election to the Committee

Both Pat Wainwright and Michael Dear have stepped down from the committee.

Two nominations have been received:

Sumitra Sribhashyam was proposed by David Waugh and seconded by Seaton Lee

Brian Evans was proposed by Mike Meynell and seconded by Grey Liple

As there were no other nominations an election was deemed unnecessary and Sumitra Sribhashyam and Brian Evans were duly appointed as new committee members.

Any Other Business:

There was no other business and Mike Dryland closed the meeting