

20TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY

Held on Monday 16th September 2019 at 7.00pm in the Lecture Theatre of the National Maritime Museum

1. Present: Andy Sawers (Chair) and approximately 107 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society
2. Apologies were received from: Christina Chester, Mike Meynell, Grey Liple, Bobby Manoo, Simon Hurst, Barry Cassels, Sue Yates, Bob Yates, Diane Cornwell, Seaton Lee and others.
3. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 17th September 2018.

4. Chair's report on the 2018-19 season

Andy welcomed everyone to the 20th Annual General Meeting of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society and said that there would be a very special anniversary lecture in December marking both the Flamsteed's 20th anniversary and the 300th anniversary of the death of the Revd John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal.

Special thanks

Andy said that it has, as ever, been an honour and a privilege to be the Chair for the past year, but that it's all the people who serve on the Committee who deserve to be thanked:

Brian Blake	Simon Hurst	Mike Meynell
Barry Cassels	Clive Inglis	Nick Phillips
Christina Chester	Asra Jilani	Malcolm Porter
Tej Dyal	Grey Liple	Andy Sawers
Helen Edwards	Bobby Manoo	Rupert Smith
Roger Geeson		

Andy noted how much effort goes into ensuring that, for each event, everything and everybody winds up in the right place at the right time, but their work makes it possible for the Members of the Society to enjoy astronomy in all its forms – talks, visits, observing sessions and workshops.

Andy also thanked:

- **Brian Evans** for his continuing support with the social evenings

- **Mike Dryland, Eddie Yeadon and Stephen Brooks** for their help in offering expert guided tours of the ROG for our guest speakers
- **Sue and Bob Yates** who assist on the refreshments table to keep us fed and watered
- **Martin and Jane Male** who make their home observatory available to Members in Romney on the Kent coast
- All the members who gave talks at our History of Astronomy sessions and at our Members' talks. Andy added that if any Member has a favourite subject that they would like to share with fellow Members, they should get in contact at the usual address: flamsted@rmg.co.uk.
- The great number of solar viewing volunteers who assist at our public viewings at Greenwich.
- Everyone who contributes to the Astrophotography video

Andy also thanked those at Royal Museums Greenwich who support our activities: the Membership department, Nick Babbs and Mikaela Webb, Lance Bourne at the ROG, the ROG astronomers and the visitor experience staff and technicians.

Membership

Andy reported that our membership numbers are at a record high – 401 as of 8th September 2019. The number of lapsed members is a little lower these days than in past years seemingly because of the number of Members who pay by direct debit (which is slightly cheaper than annual one-off payments).

	Active	Lapsed*	Total
Single memberships	129	6	135
Concessions	123	2	125
Joint members	114	12	126
Students	3	0	3
Honorary / life	12	0	12
Total people	381	20	401

Membership numbers have been trending up well over the last few years.

2015	325
2016	339
2017	356
2018	379
2019	401

Financials

The expenses management system has improved, giving us greater clarity into exactly how much is spent. In the past year the Flamsteed was only about £80 over budget. Committee members are extremely careful about expenditure, much of which is related to lecture speakers' travel and accommodation expenses.

However, readily available data on Flamsteed revenues is for some reason more difficult to secure. But looking at our growth in Membership numbers, Andy said that he could be confident we were ahead of expectations. The net result is that the Flamsteed recorded a small surplus in the past year. The Committee is discussing with the Museum how we might best deploy some of that surplus, noting that one of the ROG's solar telescopes may be in need of some care and maintenance.

Because of the relentless pressure on Museum finances, Andy said that an increase in Membership fees could not be ruled out. This is an area where the Flamsteed has really very little say in the matter, other than that we have in past years been able to maintain a 'concession' rate for Flamsteed membership – even though there is no Concession rate for membership of the Museum itself.

Events

The number of events organised by the Committee was about the same or slightly higher than the number last year, with about the same number of cancellations (almost entirely weather-related).

Event type (<i>examples</i>)	Number arranged	Cancellations	Number run
Lectures	10	0	10
Members' Talks	1	0	1
Great Equatorial Telescope viewings / planetarium back-up	6	0	6
Blackheath viewings	9	4	5
Romney viewings	6	3	3
Public solar viewings at the ROG	15	7	8
Members solar viewings at the ROG	5	3	2

Event type (examples)	Number arranged	Cancellations	Number run
Practical Astronomy workshops <i>telescopes, astrophotography and radio astronomy</i>	10	1	9
History of Astronomy group talks – <i>Women professionals at the ROG, measuring time, Arthur Eddington</i>	5	0	5
Solar viewing training sessions	1	0	1
Trips – RAS Library, First Man, Science Museum, Jodrell Bank – CX – e-Eye	5	1	4
Social evenings – Cliff Richard!!!	10	0	9
Outreach events – Charlton& Woolwich Film Festival, Eid first sighting of the New Moon	3	0	3
ROG support events – Moon Exhibition, Stranger Worlds	2	0	2
TOTAL	87	20	67

Under-18s and Memorandum of Understanding

Two years ago, Members voted almost unanimously in favour of the Committee’s proposal to lower the age of admission from 18 to 16. The aim was to encourage students of around A-level age to join so they can hear and see for themselves the passion that our guest speakers have for astronomy, in the hope that this will help encourage the next generation of astrophysicists.

Andy noted that it had been a long two years of discussions to resolve matters relating to safeguarding issues, insurance for our events onsite and off Museum premises, website issues, the Membership database and customer relationship management system.

It was also necessary to amend the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the key document that defines the relationship and obligations between the Flamsteed Astronomy Society and the Royal Museums Greenwich. The revised version of this document was signed by Andy and by Paddy Rodgers, the new Director of RMG, within the past few days.

The new terms governing the admission of 16/17-year-olds to the Flamsteed unfortunately have insurance requirements that insist on such members being accompanied by a parent or legal guardian when attending any event that does not take place on Museum premises. Whilst unfortunate, this requirement could not be negotiated away but in the end was considered to be an acceptable concession in return for being able to welcome Members under the age of 18.

Everything has now been resolved and the Flamsteed does, in fact, have its first three Young Adult members! It wasn't known if they were in the audience but Andy said that the Flamsteed was delighted to welcome them.

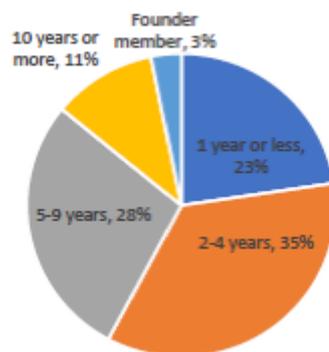
Other revisions to the MoU updated it in terms of the current technology and working practices that have developed over the years. The most significant revision other than the lowering of the admission age was the introduction of a provision allowing for the appointment of an Acting Chair or Acting Vice Chair, should the elected office holder be unable to perform their duties for an extended period of time.

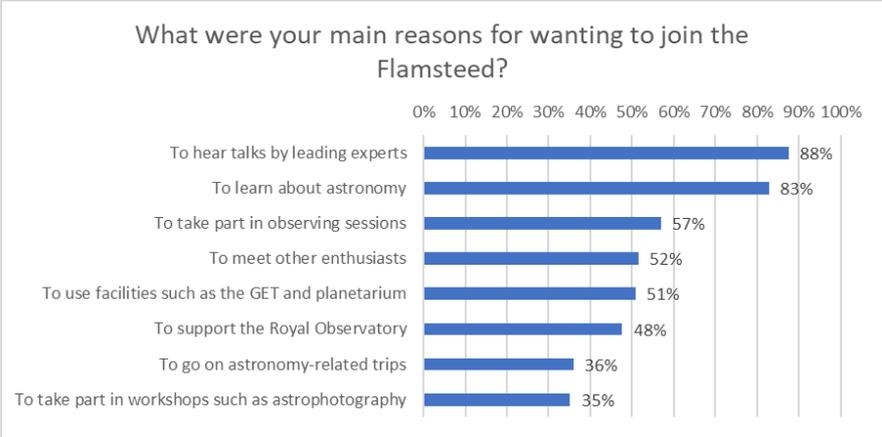
Members' survey

A survey of Flamsteed Members was carried out last year, and more than 130 kindly responded. Andy said that the Committee was very gratified by Members' feedback.

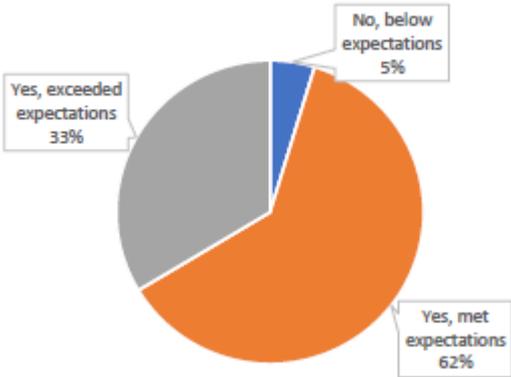
Below are some of the key highlights of the survey:

How long have you been a member of the Flamsteed?

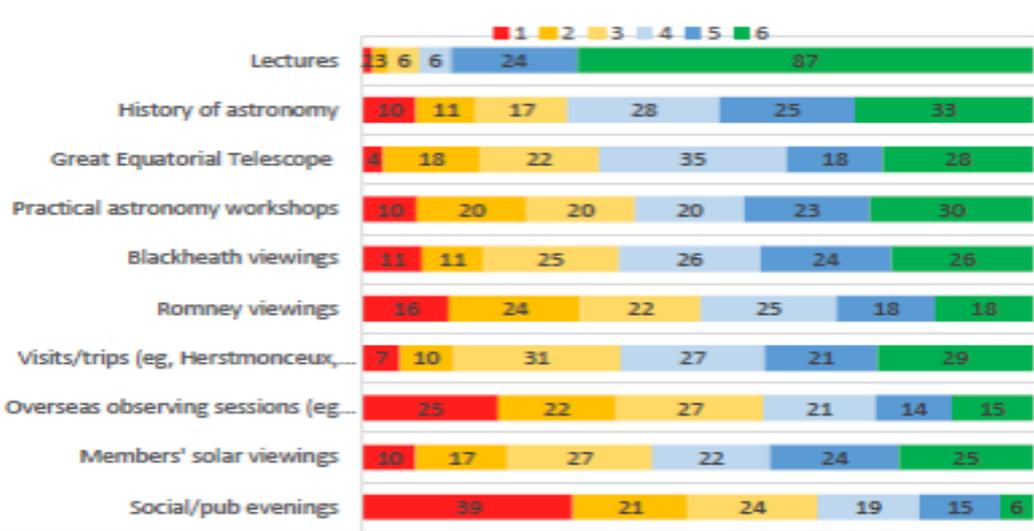




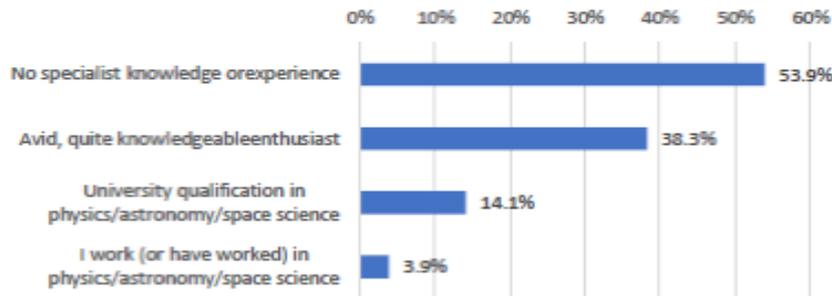
Has membership lived up to your expectations?



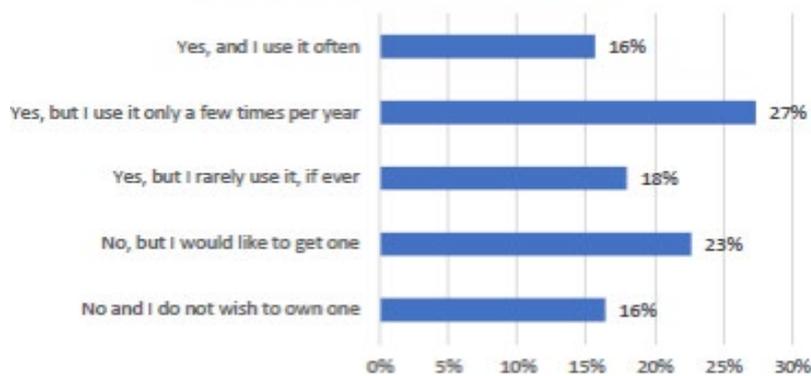
How interested are you in...



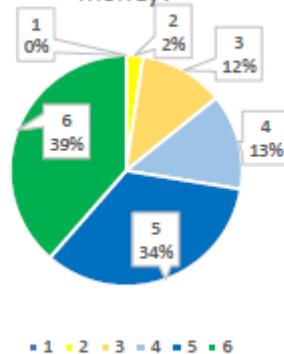
How would you describe your interest in astronomy/space science? (Please tick all that apply)



Do you own your own telescope?



Is your Flamsteed membership fee good value for money?



In summary, Andy said that the Committee learned a lot about members’ interests – preferred types of events, interest in telescopes as such, degree of expertise or familiarity with astronomy.

More importantly, the Committee is using this information to help shape our plans for the coming year. The Committee is looking at

- Introducing one-off ‘bite-sized’ introductory talks

- Hosting a British Astronomical Association ‘Back to Basics’ session (unlikely before 2021 because of the lead times involved for such events)
- Rethinking our visits (with overseas observing sessions to dark sky areas such as Spain probably not featuring in the upcoming programmes)
- Revitalising our social evenings, with plans being developed under the heading ‘Beer with an Astronomer’.
- Looking at how we communicate certain aspects of our activities using technology
- Approaching people who expressed an interest in offering to help the Flamsteed. There are a number of specific areas where the Committee could do with some extra help, such as in the History of Astronomy talks and the ‘Sky This Month’ slot in our monthly lecture.

Astronomy News

Having invited questions from the floor, one member suggested that our monthly lectures also have a brief ‘Astronomy News’ session in addition to the ‘Sky This Month’ slot. Andy said this was an idea well worth considering.

5. Election of the Committee and Office Holders

Andy said that he was very sorry to say that Christina Chester was standing down as vice chair and from her elected role on the committee. He said Christina has been a huge asset not only to the Committee but to the whole of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society. Fortunately, the Committee is not losing her entirely as she has agreed to be co-opted back onto the Committee in one of the unelected positions.

Andy was delighted to say, however, that Helen Edwards, who has been co-opted into the committee for two years and who has been very actively involved in organising the Romney events and in lining up our speaker programme, has agreed to step up to an elected position on the Committee and to serve as vice chair. He said he very much looked forward to working with Helen – assuming that he and the rest of the committee receive the support of the Membership!

Andy was pleased to hand over as chair of the AGM to Jane Bendall, the founder of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society, to manage the election process. Jane started by saying how delighted she was that she and some other Members from the earliest days of the Flamsteed would be doing a talk on the birth and development of the Flamsteed at our December lecture, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Society.

The following Committee members offered themselves for re-election (other than Helen Edwards, who is offering herself for election for the first time).

Brian Blake	Clive Inglis	Nick Phillips
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Tej Dyal	Grey Liple	Malcolm Porter
Helen Edwards	Bobby Manoo	Andy Sawers
Simon Hurst	Mike Meynell	Rupert Smith

Their election was proposed and seconded and approved by the Membership.

Andy Sawers was proposed and seconded and approved by the Membership to be Chair of the Flamsted for the coming year.

Helen Edwards was proposed and seconded and approved by the Membership to be Vice Chair of the Flamsted for the coming year.

6. Any Other Business

There being no further business, Andy Sawers brought the AGM to a close.