

**22nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY**

Held on Thursday 9th September 2021 at 7.15pm online via Zoom

1. Present

Andy Sawers (Chair) and approximately 66 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society.

2. Apologies

Andy reported apologies received from Andrew Kitching, Mike Meynell, Peter Ramell and Paul Shepherd. No others received by Poly Philippou, the Committee Secretary.

3. Chair's welcome

Andy welcomed everyone to the 22nd annual general meeting. He said he was joined in the control room by Simon Hurst and Bobby Manoo, and he thanked Simon Hurst for his Tchaikovsky-style video introduction, the music of which comes from the film Black Swan – appropriate, as Andy said that this AGM would be his swan song. We had quorum and Andy called this AGM to order.

4. Minutes of the AGM held on 7th September 2020

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the 21st AGM held on 7th September 2020, and they were accepted as read by a “show of hands” on Zoom.

5. Chair's report on the 2020-21 season and plans for 2021-22

Report on 2020-2021 season

Andy noted that a year has gone by and we still have not managed to meet together in a more social setting – which is really what ‘societies’ are supposed to do. Moreover, it is exactly 18 months to the day since we last met in the lecture theatre of the National Maritime Museum. We had no conception back then that we would still be dealing with this terrible coronavirus situation today. He offered his best wishes for a full and speedy recovery to those who have been hit by the virus and condolences to those who have suffered loss.

It has been a busy year, even though we have not been able to do any of the ‘on site’ activities that we had hoped to, such as viewings on Blackheath or at Romney, solar observing sessions, visits to the Great Equatorial Telescope, the Peter Harrison Planetarium or the Annie Maunder Astrographic Telescope (AMAT), trips, nor any outreach events.

Moreover, regrettably we had almost no summer programme over July and August. Covid issues relating to site access and RMG staffing amidst the ‘pingdemic’ meant that it was a much slower process than planned to revert to our usual public and members solar viewing sessions. By the time it became apparent that such events simply could not take place, it was too late into the summer to plan online alternatives.

Andy noted that neither had the night skies this year had anything as beautiful as last year's Comet Neowise. But he praised members for the astronomy images they had submitted for the Flamsteed's pre-lecture opening video, and showcased a dozen or so favourite images.

Over the last year, however, the Flamsteed has run 30 events or video presentations.

12	Lectures
1	Astrophotography workshop
6	History of astronomy talks
2	ROG-partnered talks
5	'Night sky', 'astronomy news' and history video presentations
4	Social evenings
30	

We usually have 10 lectures a year but we had two bonus lectures: one from ROG astronomer Emily Drabek-Maunder who was one of the researchers in the apparent discovery of phosphine on Venus, and a lecture in partnership with Havering Astronomical Society in Essex, in which Dr Don Lincoln from FERMI Institute spoke about the search for a unified theory of everything.

Andy noted that one of our guest lecturers this year, Prof Catherine Heymans, has since been announced as the Astronomer Royal for Scotland.

He thanked Vice Chair Helen Edwards who leads the search for the world's best astronomy experts to come and speak to us and charms them into agreeing to do so.

Our astrophotography workshop featured the hugely talented Andrew McCarthy from the western USA.

Our History of Astronomy talks welcomed back three good friends – Greg Smye-Rumsby who spoke on the history of longitude, and former ROG astronomers Brendan Owens and Tom Kerrs who gave a historical perspective on sunspots and the northern lights. Flamsteed member Thomas Obitz gave an interesting talk on an 18th century Indian observatory.

Andy thanked Bobby Manoo who currently leads the HoA programme, single-handedly.

In recent months our main lectures and our History of Astronomy talks have had a softer 'close' to the evening, with an informal chat with our guest speakers for 10-15 minutes rather than just cutting them off at the end of their talk. It's like the chat you would have with the speaker over a glass of wine after the lecture, Andy explained. This has been hugely popular with guest speakers and members alike, though he noted that we all have to bring our own wine! Thanks to Bobby for suggesting the idea and making it work.

The ROG-partnered evenings were a fireside chat and a 'virtual planetarium', with thanks to ROG astronomers Greg Brown, Patricia Skelton and Anna Ross.

Andy thanked Adrian Challinor for his 'astronomy news' videos, and Malcolm Porter and Mike Meynell for the 'What's in the Night Sky' videos. Andy recently presented a video on the mysterious dark side of Isaac Newton – information that we learned from the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Andy thanked Brian Evans for hosting the social evenings, which are great fun but not quite the same as being in a proper pub, so we hope to be able to have our socials in a Greenwich hostelry before too much longer.

A lot of work gets put in by the team to make sure that all these events come off as glitch-free and professional as possible. Every single event has a rehearsal session with the guest speaker, and additional rehearsals are carried

out by our tech team to make sure we've got the transitions right and that we can deal with any of a number of potential problems. The tech team uses checklists that are typically 5-6 pages long and are invaluable in making sure the right buttons are pressed at the right time, the Q&A sessions are managed properly, and so on. Andy added that Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins described the checklist as the fourth member of the crew.

Very special thanks were given to Simon Hurst for all the work he has done in developing our checklists, for always making himself available for rehearsals and events, and for taking the lead on the tech side when we deal with different speakers' set-ups. Thanks were also given to Tej Dyal, Adrian Challinor, Barry Cassels and Bobby Manoo.

Additional to our 30 events, Flamsteed members were also invited to join two other events. One was a virtual tour of the Palermo observatory in Sicily organised by ROG senior curator Louise Devoy (who has also invited Flamsteed members to a virtual tour of the observatory at the Cape of Good Hope next Monday afternoon, the same day as our first evening lecture of the season). We were also invited to join the Stargazing and the City session which was run by former ROG astronomers Tom Keress and Radmila Topalovic.

Gifted telescope

The Flamsteed was gifted a Dobsonian telescope and had various ideas such as using it as a raffle prize, a demonstration telescope on Blackheath or as a loan telescope. But as Covid rolled on these ideas became impracticable. Instead, the Committee found a good home for the telescope in a south London school where one of our members is involved in an active astronomy programme.

Membership numbers

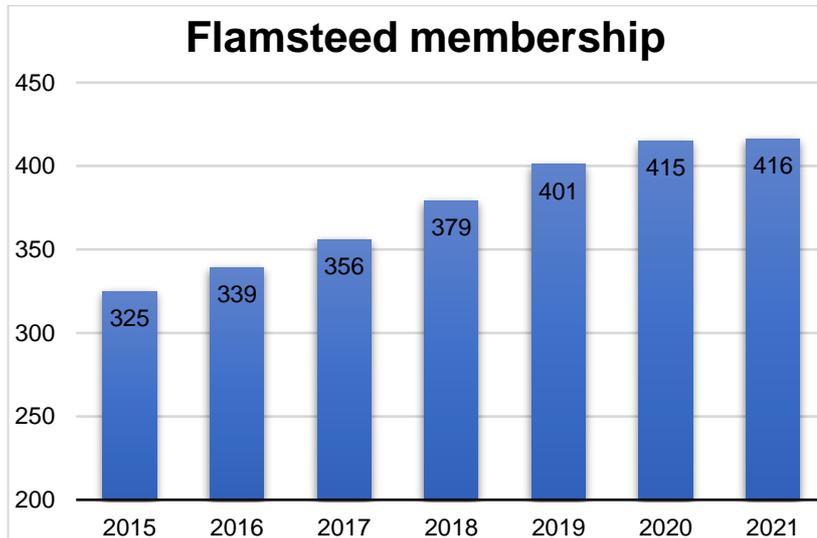
Total Flamsteed membership is up by one since last year. Andy noted that members who have renewed their membership at least once have been with the Flamsteed for an average of eight years and counting.

Membership	Sept 2019	Aug 2020	Sept 2021
Single	129	128	132
Concession	123	131	121
Joint	114	134	124
Honorary	12	13	12
Young adult (16-17)	3	4	1
Total	381	410	390
Lapsed	20	5	26
Total	401	415	416

There has been no activity in the young adult category (for those aged 16-17) because it has not been possible to engage in outreach programmes with schools, while schools and families have not been able to go to the Royal Observatory. But this will be worked on, Andy said.

The number of lapsed members – those who have not renewed their membership over the past three months – has gone back to about where it was two years ago. This may be because of the four-month extension to memberships last year which disguised the underlying number of lapsed members last year. Andy commented that the Museum now offers a £10 discount to those who pay by direct debit compared with the one-off fee.

The other figure of note, sadly, is the loss of not just one of our Honorary members, but one of our first honorary members, Eddie Yeadon, who was the founding Chair of the Flamsteed back in 1999, and who passed away a year ago next month. Eddie was a remarkable driving force for the Flamsteed, along with people such as Jane Bendall, Lynn Potter and Mike Dryland. Although most of today's members may not know it, we are all as a society very much in Eddie's debt. There is a lovely tribute to Eddie on the Flamsteed website, written by Mike Dryland, under the 'About us' tab.



Financials

Because our membership numbers have held up so well, revenue has also held up well, and has stabilised after the accounting adjustments that had to be made last year because of the four-month extension to memberships.

Our costs are considerably less than in the days when we used to meet in the National Maritime Museum, because a Zoom licence is cheaper than the cost of staff overtime when we meet in the evening, but our Zoom licence is not in itself cheap. It does, however, give us a lot of flexibility and we can use it for additional events at no extra cost.

We also occasionally have fees for speakers, more usually for those for whom talking is their way of life, rather than those who are academics, researchers or space agency employees.

The net effect, Andy said was that we are making a small but positive and much-needed contribution to RMG at a time when its revenue from tourists through the gate and in the shops is down by about 90% – or £8.5m in round figures, by his estimate.

The Museum was due to increase membership fees in April 2020, just as Covid hit, but instead they increased the price for new joiners and kept renewals the same until April 2021. But the discount available for direct debit payers was increased to £10. Fees are likely to be reviewed again for April 2022.

Plans for the coming year

It remains unclear when we can return to Greenwich as far as the NMM lecture theatre is concerned, Andy said. Capacity there is currently limited to just 38, rather than the usual 120. So even if we are able to find a way to do events onsite and online simultaneously – livestreaming from the lecture theatre – it is still unlikely to be worth the expense of paying for Museum staff to do overtime for the sake of 30-odd people in attendance. This means we will likely be remaining online for at least a little while more.

On September 21st, there is an ROG event called *Behind the Lens of the Astrophotography awards* and Committee members will be studying it at close quarters both onsite and online to see what we can learn from that

experience that we can use in our lectures. This will be our first opportunity to get into the lecture theatre to test its recently-improved technology and broadband capability.

We were informed the day before the AGM that it should be possible to schedule some evenings at the Great Equatorial Telescope, but we are awaiting details about capacity, social distancing, cleansing of focussing knobs, and so on. Also, the GET will be shut for essential maintenance from January to March – just about the worst possible time as far as viewing is concerned, but this is completely out of the Flamsteed's hands. But some Planetarium or AMAT talks may be a possibility.

We will continue to use Zoom for things that we couldn't otherwise do, in particular to get speakers that we couldn't otherwise reach, either because they are too far away for travel to be economical, or because the guest speaker prefers not to make the journey.

For the most part, our History of Astronomy talks will remain online, partly because our attendance figures now online are greater than our maximum capacity at our usual real-world sites.

There is nothing new to say at the moment about possible viewing sessions on Blackheath or at Romney, other than to say that we are all very eager to get back to our usual viewing sites – safely.

Vision 2021

The Committee decided earlier this year that it would be sensible to take stock of what we do, and to think and discuss very carefully what it is that we're about. Bobby Manoo took the lead on this Vision 2021 project, and Poly Philippou, our Committee Secretary, is particularly good at cracking the whip and making sure that we do things to deadline.

In this project, we've been looking at how we should do lectures and History of Astronomy talks, covering the points already discussed by Andy. We aim to do a survey of members about this, once we have a clearer picture as to what it is we will be capable of offering members from a technology standpoint.

Our post-lecture chat is one of the things that came out of this Vision 2021 process.

We're also looking at other types of video-based projects involving the ROG, our members and more introductory sessions, and we're looking at our radio astronomy offering.

We previously thought an online means of doing night-time observing might be possible. While technically it is, it's not great, Andy said. We have concluded that much of the fun of observing is being together and in seeing things through telescopes with our own eyes rather than on a screen, so we have ruled out any Zoom-based observing.

We also want to look at how we do outreach though obviously schools and pupils in particular have been busy with other things. Other events that we typically take part in have been cancelled such as New Scientist Live where we've been delighted to be a guest on the British Astronomical Association's stand for a few years.

Finally, a lot of work has gone into updating our website. A complete redesigning is also on its way. Thanks to Poly, Adrian, and Mike in particular for all that work.

Thanks

While words of thanks were liberally sprinkled throughout Andy's presentation, he added a few other words of gratitude.

The RMG Membership department – Chloe Shepherd, Sarah Foster and Tessa Mo – without whom we couldn't survive.

Kate Seekts – the RMG development director who has been very supportive of our work.

The whole Committee: everyone has done whatever they can in difficult circumstances. Andy explained, especially for those who are new to the society, that all of our Committee members are volunteers, with day jobs or retirement activities, families, and Covid challenges. And yet the Committee dedicates themselves to the pleasure of making it possible for others to share their love for astronomy.

Grey Lipley and Malcolm Porter for their unfailing support and words of wisdom and experience.

Andy thanked the members of the Flamsteed for wholeheartedly embracing this new way of doing astronomy, and for all the lovely emails of praise and support.

Finally, Andy said that he is standing down as Chair after five years and from his elected position on the Committee after seven years. He and his wife are about to start the very busy process of retiring, downsizing, and relocating to Scotland. It's been a marvellous time in this role and a great honour, but while Zoom has shown we can work from anywhere, Andy said he thought that, as the Observatory opens up and we start to return to live events, it's important that your Chair is someone who is able to be present here.

So his last words of thanks went to Mike Meynell, for his confidence in suggesting to Andy and to the Committee that he succeed Malcolm Porter as Chair; and to Christina Chester, who was appointed as co-Vice Chair the same time Andy became Chair. It was a great experience working together and bouncing ideas off of each other. Andy said she was a real help to him in his early years in the role.

Questions?

One member asked about the correct weblink to use to access the recordings of Flamsteed events. Andy said that the arrangements for accessing our publicly-available and our password-protected material is changing and being simplified, but that an email explaining all this will be sent to members very shortly.

Comments of thanks received from a number of members.

6. Elections

Andy was delighted to say that the Committee has persuaded Bobby Manoo to be your next Chair. Andy will also be stepping down from his elected position on the Committee, creating one vacancy in the 12 elected slots, but will be happy to make himself available on a co-opted basis, should the Committee so wish. Andy was pleased to say that Adrian Challinor, who has been a co-opted member of the Committee for a couple of years has agreed to put himself forward for the elected position.

Adrian first became interested in things related to space when he watched Apollo 8 orbit the moon in 1968. His interest in the ROG started when his wife bought him an Introduction to Astronomy course at the ROG, which he followed up with a GCSE in Astronomy, then a course in foundation astrophysics. He has been active in the Flamsteed for a number of years.

Bobby has had an interest in astronomy since his teenage years in Trinidad. He joined the Flamsteed in Oct 2013 while doing a course at the ROG since when he has completed around 5 courses on Astronomy and Astrophotography at the ROG. He has given more than a dozen Sky This Month talks and presented a talk on Ancient Astronomical Alignments. He joined the Committee four years ago whereupon he took on the task of organising our HoA programme. He has also completed an online course in Astronomy with the University of Central Lancashire. Bobby has moved from taking courses to giving them: last year he presented three Introduction to Astronomy sessions for Flamsteed members, and links to these are now included in our 'Welcome' email that goes out to new members. Bobby has also been leading our Vision 2021 programme. In fact, said Andy, Bobby is much more qualified for the role of Chair than Andy was five years ago. Bobby is also a very accomplished artist!

Elected and co-opted members of the Committee:

Barry Cassels	Simon Hurst	Mike Meynell
Adrian Challinor	Clive Inglis	Poly Philippou
Tej Dyal	Asra Jilani	Nick Phillips
Helen Edwards	Grey Liple	Malcolm Porter
Roger Geeson	Bobby Manoo	Andy Sawers

Members of the Committee putting themselves forward for re-election (Adrian: first-time election):

Barry Cassels	Simon Hurst	Mike Meynell
Adrian Challinor	Clive Inglis	Poly Philippou
Tej Dyal	Grey Liple	Nick Phillips
Helen Edwards	Bobby Manoo	Malcolm Porter

Andy added that he was pleased Helen Edwards is putting herself forward for re-election as Vice Chair. She has served in this role for two years and has been a great support. She also has the key role of finding our guest speakers who are the cornerstone of the society.

He then handed over to Simon Hurst to manage the election process.

The re-election of the Committee members was proposed by Bill O'Brien and seconded by Anoop Sharma and the motion was passed with 47 votes in favour.

The re-election of Helen Edwards as Vice Chair was proposed by Leslie Stephens and seconded by Jessica Kempner and was passed with 47 votes in favour.

The election of Bobby Manoo as Chair was proposed by Mike Richardson and seconded by Nick Davies and was passed with 49 votes in favour.

Andy thanked Members for their support for all the committee members.

7. A few words from our new Chair, Bobby Manoo

Andy invited Bobby to say a few words, his first words as the new Chair.

Bobby thanked Andy and greeted those present. He said that it is indeed an honour to be elected to serve as Chair for the Flamsteed Astronomy Society and he would like to sincerely thank both the committee and the membership for the confidence they have all placed in him. This is not a role that he takes lightly and he will put every effort in ensuring that the activities of the society are carried out in the usual professional and diligent manner that we have grown accustomed to.

Andy has served as Chair for the past five years and during this time he has certainly had a fair amount of challenges to deal with. We have had to reorganise our events due to the Covid Pandemic and restructure the way in which we conduct our affairs. During the initial lockdown period, Flamsteed was very quick to switch to using online formats for events – arguably we were one of the first Astronomy societies to do so. Andy was key to all of this effort, he worked with Committee members in exploring options, working through running orders and understanding the limits of the technology. He was very meticulous in ensuring that every single detail was worked through, explored and documented – he led by example and pushed the team for the same high standards that he exemplifies.

Andy is a leader who encourages creativity and the exploration of ideas. He not only supported new initiatives but also threw himself into these projects and did all that he could to see things through and clear the path, this is a commendable characteristic. In addition to all his professional demeanour, he is also a very affable person to work with, he has a very congenial and easy-going attitude – even when slip ups occur. This society has found a safe pair of hands with Andy in the Chair and we can only be grateful.

We are not yet done with singing his praises, in the near future, when it is convenient for us to get together, then we can show our appreciation in person. But for now, on behalf of the entire Committee and by extension, the general membership, Bobby would like to sincerely thank Andy for his years at the helm and look forward to his continued good work with the society.

As we move towards a new season at Flamsteed, the Committee has already begun shaping up all of our activities (our first main lecture will be by Prof Lewis Dartnell from University of Westminster). We hope to resume some type of in person events within the next season but the exact timing will depend on when it is reasonably safe to do so. We have our ongoing relations with the NMM and of course, the Royal Observatory and will work collectively in defining what the new normal will look like.

We have a number of new events planned and we are all very excited about these. Bobby has always felt that the best way to explore any passion or interest is to actively participate in them. We will therefore look towards creating more opportunities for members to participate in events including perhaps some of our online offerings. In addition, if there are any events or ideas which you would like to propose for the Society, do get in touch with us as we always welcome feedback and comments from you, the members.

We are all part of this society because we have a passion for Astronomy, and this, of course applies to all of our Committee members. Bobby is heartened by the fact that this team consists of individuals who bring varied expertise and interests to the society. For many of us on the committee, we have our day jobs and other commitments but we make allowances to volunteer our time and expertise because of our interest in this field. The success of our programs each year is due to the efforts of all our hard-working committee members and Bobby is very proud to be a part of this team and he looks forward to working with this committee in the upcoming season. He trusted that you will continue to extend your support to our collective efforts as we begin this new season.

So with that, Bobby said a heartfelt thanks to Andy once again and very best wishes to all the committee and all members as we begin this new chapter at Flamsteed.

Andy thanked Bobby in return for his kind words.

8. Any other business

No other business was raised.

There being no other business, Andy brought the AGM to a close at 20:08 and introduced “Flamsteed Fantasia”, a video prepared by Andy himself.

***Minutes produced by Committee Secretary
Issued on 26th September 2021***