

**Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014 in The Forum, Greenwich at 7.00 p.m.**

Present: Malcolm Porter (Chairman), Grey Liplely (Vice Chairman) Mike Meynell (Vice Chairman), Nick Phillips, Lin Potter, Rupert Smith and Sumitra Sribhashyam.

Apologies: Asra Jilani, Brian Blake, Christina Chester and Roger Geeson.

1. Matters Arising:

For personal reasons, Asra has stepped down as Committee Secretary, but will remain on the committee. Roles and responsibilities will be revisited in September.

At the last committee meeting, we agreed that Sumitra would take on the role of Membership Secretary. Unfortunately, as there are various problems with the introduction of the new membership and booking system, it has not been possible to complete this handover. Once the new system has stabilised, we will look at moving this forward.

2. Purchases from the Reserve Fund:

Malcolm distributed a list of potential purchases for the Royal Observatory from the Flamsteed reserve fund. The list had come from various discussions between members of the committee and representatives from the Royal Observatory Greenwich.

Committee members expressed concern that some of the items on the list could be interpreted as being part of the fabric of the museum and should therefore come out of normal museum budgets rather than donated by the Flamsteed. It was agreed that we would ask the museum for further information regarding these purchases before agreeing to any spend.

The committee expressed a preference for purchasing items that were to be used for educational purposes and items that would also be beneficial for Flamsteed members when attending museum events.

In addition, concern was expressed about purchasing items for the 28-inch telescope when it is not clear whether the telescope is to be used for active observing or is to be treated as a museum piece. We would like more information on the future strategy for the use of the 28-inch telescope, in particular the plans to clean the object glass and the mirror within the diagonal.

It was agreed that we should also look at imaging equipment and a laptop for the existing solar telescopes in order to aid in public events.

The committee approved some items on the list, as the benefits were clear. Further discussion needs to take place with the museum with regards the remaining items. Malcolm agreed to review the results of the discussion and circulate to committee members and also to arrange a further meeting with the museum.

A question was raised on whether we should look at using some of the funds for constructing an observatory of our own, possibly in conjunction with another astronomy society. It was agreed to discuss this option at a later date.

### 3. Future of the Radio Astronomy Group:

Due to various circumstances, it has only been possible to arrange two meetings of the Radio Astronomy Group in the last year or so. It has become apparent that a very limited number of people have been interested in active participation in radio astronomy and this has clearly reduced the scope for moving the group forward.

In addition, our plans for siting radio equipment at the ROG, in particular plans for the Flamsteed VLF receiver, have been delayed due to overrunning maintenance work in the area that we had hoped to place the receiver. Also, our proposal for siting live meteor detection screens in the museum does not seem to be possible in the short-to-medium term.

It was agreed that we would discuss these issues at the next Radio Astronomy Group meeting on 15 March. Specifically, we need to encourage group members to get more involved in setting the strategy and direction of the group. In addition, forging more links with other radio groups in the UK may help to give the group impetus. Arranging trips to sites of interest, such as Herstmonceux and the Norman Lockyer Observatory, may help in increasing interest in the group. We agreed to review progress at a later committee meeting.

### 4. Programme Secretary Role – Split of Responsibilities:

It has become apparent that the Programme Secretary role is too big a role for a single person to perform. We agreed that the role would be split into two in the future:

- Programme Secretary: role will focus on agreeing the lecture topics, approaching potential lecturers, and booking lecturers for each lecture date. Administration is then handed on to:
- Programme Administrator: responsible for agreeing lecture dates, booking the lecture theatre, lining up museum resource to support on the evening, lining up volunteers to provide refreshments on the evening, contacting the lecturer to find out technology requirements, agreeing on meeting arrangements with the lecturer on the evening of the event (including lining up tours and/or dinner), sending

thank-you note to the lecturer, administering any expense or fee reimbursements for the lecturer.

There is a third role - host - which doesn't have to be assigned to a single person... this would be the person who meets and greets on the evening, and hosts the lecture.

Brian Blake will continue in the Programme Secretary role. He has already made fantastic progress in booking lecturers for the vast majority of the 2014/15 Flamsteed season and the committee thanked Brian for the work that he had done.

Mike Meynell will temporarily perform the Programme Administrator role for the remainder of the 2013/14 season. This role will need to be filled prior to the 2014/15 season.

#### 5. Social Evenings:

Some members had enquired about expanding our social activities by setting up coffee meet-ups, as they wanted to take part in more social activities but didn't feel comfortable attending the existing pub socials.

Partly in response to this request, we had moved the venue for the existing social evening to the Trafalgar Tavern in Greenwich. There is a free car park just two minutes away (free after 7pm) and the pub does serve food in the evening, along with tea and coffee for those who do not want to drink. We will continue with this venue for the next month or so and monitor attendance levels. We would also look at other venues as options.

The committee did not support the idea of a separate social event, and did not think a second social event would be viable. Around a dozen members normally attend the existing social evening. On that basis, it wasn't clear that the demand for a second evening existed.

It was suggested that we might want to combine the social evenings with other activities, such as observing events on Blackheath, as has been the case previously, particularly if the observing event was clouded out.

#### 6. Digital Strategy:

We continually review the website to ensure that we keep up to date with new technology and to ensure the content is easy to access and eye catching. In the last few months, changes have been made to make the site more usable on mobile devices and tablets, as it was clear that more people were accessing the site in this way. These changes have been well received.

However, it was clear that further improvements could be made, so the committee agreed to form a small sub-committee to look at the digital strategy of the society, particularly in relation to the image that we are looking to project and streamlining certain areas of content within the existing site.

Mike agreed to lead the sub-committee and will be in touch with those who expressed an interest in being involved soon.

7. Videos of “Sky this Month” Presentations:

Some members have asked if it would be possible to recording videos of the “Sky this Month” sections of our lectures and providing access to those on the Flamsteed website.

The committee agreed that this would be a good idea. Mike agreed to speak to the museum technicians at the next lecture to see if it would be possible to use the equipment in the lecture theatre to record this section of the lecture evening. If not, it should be possible to use relatively cheap equipment to record the presentation.

8. Chairs in Lecture Theatre:

The chairs in the lecture theatre have been situated at the front of the lecture theatre in the last couple of lectures. The chairs should be at the back of the lecture theatre to stop the front of the lecture theatre looking cluttered and also to provide seats for people to sit next to any disabled members at the back of the lecture theatre.

Mike agreed to raise this with the museum. In the event of the seats being at the front of the lecture theatre in the future, we would move some to the back for the use of members.

9. Refreshments at Lectures:

We have been made aware that the biscuits and crisps provided at the end of lectures have been running out very quickly. The provision of carbonated water has also been requested.

Mike agreed to raise this with the museum and potentially increase the range of refreshments made available to members after the lecture.

10. Associate Members:

We had previously discussed the possibility of introducing a new category of membership of the society for those members who live far away from Greenwich and can only attend a small number of events. In previous discussions with the museum, we had

been told that it was not technically possible to introduce a new category of membership due to restrictions within the membership system.

As the new membership system has now been introduced, it was agreed that we would raise this with the museum again and see if it was technically feasible. The idea would be to have an associate membership, with reduced membership fees, for those members who live outside a defined distance from Greenwich.

Mike and Malcolm agreed to take this discussion forward with the museum.

#### 11. Any Other Business:

##### Audio Problems in the Lecture Theatre

There had been a problem with the sound system in the lecture theatre at Sanjeev Gupta's lecture in January. Unfortunately, there was no technician present to solve the issue. Also, some members have said that they have a problem hearing the questions asked by members in the Q&A session at end of the lectures.

It was agreed that, in the future, the hand-held microphone would be used in lectures. We would need a volunteer to help to give the microphone to any member who wanted to ask a question at the end of the lecture. This would have the added benefit of providing a back-up solution in case the radio microphone used by the lecturer failed, as was the case in Sanjeev's lecture.

##### Problems with Membership Renewals and the Booking System

Some committee members have had problems with renewal of their membership subscriptions. This is reflective of a wider problem with the new membership system and the lack of a lapsed period. This problem is under discussion with the museum and will hopefully be resolved soon.

Some members have had problems with the new booking system. We have been informed that the museum is working through the problems that the new system has introduced. We will continue to monitor progress.

##### Flickr Photography Group

Sumitra agreed to do a presentation on the Flamsteed Flickr photography group at a future lecture.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed at 9pm.