

## **Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 21st May 2015 at 7pm in Mycenae House**

Present: Malcolm Porter (Chairman), Grey Liple (Vice Chairman), Mike Meynell (Vice Chairman), Andy Sawers, Brian Evans, Clive Inglis, Mike Dryland, Nick Phillips, Roger Geeson and Rupert Smith

Apologies: Asra Jilani, Brian Blake, Christina Chester, Lin Potter, Sumitra Sri Bhashyam and Tej Dyal

The Committee welcomed Brian Evans back as a co-opted member.

### **1. Matters arising from the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015**

#### Radio equipment installation

Our radio astronomy equipment unfortunately did not go 'live' in the ROG Alt-Az Pavilion at Easter time. A heater had broken which was not noticed by the Museum's estates department, causing damp and rendering the building not fit for the purpose. Also, the type of network connection has not been confirmed. The Museum has been notified as to who needs access to the equipment once installed. A reply from the Museum is expected by mid-summer.

The Alt-Az Pavilion has been listed as part of the London Open House programme on September 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> so the building will certainly have to be usable by then. While this delay is deeply frustrating, Rob Edwards, head of education at the ROG, is very keen for the installation of radio astronomy equipment to happen.

#### SMASHfestUK

The organisers of the SMASHfestUK event were very pleased to have the Flamsteed in attendance supporting this youth event and, if it is held again next year, they are likely to invite us back.

#### Solar eclipse, 20<sup>th</sup> March

Despite a considerable effort of organisation, this event had everything except the Sun. Attendance by members of the public was excellent despite the minimal chance of them seeing anything.

Had the weather been good, the crowd control procedures would have almost certainly worked well. Some concern was raised about the effectiveness of crowd control if instead there had been a sudden break in the clouds, which might have caused a surge towards the telescopes.

The experience will be helpful in preparing for the 2016 transit of Mercury. This will almost certainly be held within ROG grounds and not the Royal Park, because of sightlines.

### Under 18s

While the Committee is not aware of any under 18s attending Flamsteed members only events since this issue was discussed at our last meeting, it is concerned that there is no membership enrolment procedure in place at the Museum to stop it happening again.

### IAU 'Name an Exosystem' competition

Our entry into the International Astronomical Union 'NameExoWorlds' competition is being organised by Christina Chester. Flamsteed members have been polled to decide which system they wanted to name and they opted for Upsilon Andromedae, which has three planets orbiting it. In May, members were polled again to suggest possible names for the star and planets and a small number of very interesting suggestions were made.

In the next stage, members will be asked to choose which of the suggested names they wish to be put forward to the IAU for consideration and, ultimately, a global vote.

### Herstmonceux

A Flamsteed visit to Herstmonceux is currently being planned. This will take place on the evening of Saturday 17 October, when, in collaboration with the Wealden Astronomical Society, we are participating in a private evening event at the Observatory Science Centre. Weather permitting, we will get to use the telescopes at Herstmonceux, otherwise there will be a tour of the telescope domes. Tickets will cost £20 each and there will be a hot & cold buffet and well as talks.

## **2. Membership fees**

Mike M circulated a summary of the new membership fee arrangements (which is attached here as an appendix). The new arrangements are broadly designed to encourage members to pay by direct debit. The impact of the reduction in membership fees would be to lower

Flamsteed income by about £1,000 a year, leaving us with an annual surplus of around £500 after all expenses.

It had been agreed some years ago with the Museum that the Flamsteed would pay the cost of Museum staff on the nights we have lectures, but this accounting procedure has not been consistently implemented. This means that our surplus may have been overstated in previous years, though the impact can't be assessed in retrospect. In any case, the surplus has been used to purchase items for the use of the Royal Observatory Greenwich.

The principle that the Committee now wants to see adopted by the Museum is that the surplus can be spent as the Committee sees fit.

It was noted that the Museum had previously been buying refreshments for the Flamsteed lectures. This arrangement has recently been changed, so that we are now purchasing the refreshments, and this is likely to be a better and easier arrangement for everyone.

The Committee noted what a great job had been done by Malcolm and Mike M in what turned out to be difficult and protracted negotiations with the Museum. A new Flamsteed promotional leaflet is being designed by the Museum in conjunction with Christina and Mike M, with the new fees. It was noted that the Museum's website was carrying incorrect pricing information.

The Committee approved the new fee arrangements.

### **3. Lapsed members**

With the introduction of a new fee arrangement designed to encourage payment of membership fees by direct debit, the Museum is keen to get rid of the arrangements whereby 'lapsed members' – those who have not renewed but who may simply have forgotten to do so – are granted a three month period to renew without losing their Flamsteed membership (membership of the RMG has no lapsed period). The Memorandum of Understanding between the Museum and the Flamsteed provides for a three-month lapse period, but it was acknowledged that this arrangement dates back to a time when payment by cheque and cash was much more common than it is today.

However, the Museum membership system has presented a number of difficulties, seemingly dropping off members at random even though they have paid their fees, and the committee is still not convinced about the robustness of the renewals procedures (based on anecdotal evidence from Flamsteed members, who claim that they are not being contacted by the museum to remind them to renew). In light of this, the Committee said that the three-month period should not be reduced until we have more confidence in the Museum's membership system and the renewal procedures. It was recognised that the 'lapse' causes difficulties for the Museum's membership department, but Mike M has built a spreadsheet

tool that helps address this, and enables the society to identify lapsed and dropped members, rather than relying on the museum to provide this information.

It was noted that the Museum's booking system allows non-Flamsteed members to register for Flamsteed lectures, and that these bookings are manually filtered out by the membership department prior to the event taking place.

#### **4. Donations to the ROG**

After some considerable delay, the ROG finally purchased the list of equipment that was agreed some time ago, using funds donated to the ROG from the Flamsteed surplus. Nick Babbs from the ROG has thanked the Flamsteed for the donations.

A list of equipment bought by the ROG is attached as an appendix so that we can thank the Membership.

The Flamsteed has a reserve of about £5,000. It was reiterated that under the new fee arrangements our surplus accumulate run at a rate of around £500 a year.

#### **5. Unused telescopes**

The ROG has a storage area with a number of unused telescopes and has asked the Flamsteed to inspect them to see if they are still usable. It may be necessary to cannibalise the equipment, taking parts from one telescope to replace those on another. Some of the telescopes may be donated to local schools or made available to lend to Members though no decisions has been taken on what to do with them until after we know what is there. Mike asked for volunteers to assist in inspecting the telescopes. The storage area will still be available in the future.

#### **6. Booking arrangements**

All Flamsteed events apart from lectures use the Eventbrite booking system. The downside of this system is that it cannot prevent non-members (or members' friends/partners) from booking places. It is necessary for a manual check to be made whether all registrants actually qualify. As no more than 30-40 people are booked on to any Flamsteed event using this procedure, the manual check is not a particularly onerous task. It is relatively rare for people to book onto an event that they are not entitled to attend.

While the Museum's booking system cannot stop non-Flamsteed members from booking for Flamsteed lectures, either, that system has been criticised by members for being 'clunky'

with difficult to remember logon IDs. However, it was decided to stick with the Museum's booking system for lectures for the time being, to prevent taking on additional burdensome tasks, given that up to 120 people can book for a Flamsteed lecture.

## **7. Summer solstice**

The Summer solstice takes place on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June. ROG will be organising a number of public events on that day and the Flamsteed has been asked to expand its role beyond its usual 'solar viewing'.

The event takes place 1pm-4pm. The Flamsteed will be hosting a solar viewing event using the Museum H-alpha telescopes and white light filter telescopes provided by Flamsteed members. Also, Rupert will be hosting two solar photography workshops, where the emphasis will be on the photos rather than a detailed explanation of the process. This will take place in the South Building.

## **8. Event planning**

Looking to our programme of events for 2015-16, it was noted that our current year programme had around 85-90 events. This number has probably quadrupled in about 5 years. Committee members were asked to consider whether this was too many, too few, or just the right number, and to consider as well whether it was the right mix of events: public/members only; lectures, viewings, visits, social events, and so on.

## **9. Visits**

Clive is trying to arrange two visits – one to the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory in Cambridge and another to the Norman Lockyer Observatory in Devon.

It's yet to be decided whether the Mullard visit should be for members of the radio astronomy group or whether it is worth opening it up to all Flamsteed members. The timing is likely to be in September as tours are apparently typically hosted by post-graduate students during term time.

The visit to the Norman Lockyer Observatory will be a "fact-finding" trip, to discuss how radio astronomy is promoted at the Norman Lockyer.

## **10. Shrewsbury Park**

The Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival takes place 28<sup>th</sup> June at 2pm-5pm. The Flamsteed will be taking part, bringing solar telescopes and talking about astrophotography. The Committee are awaiting final details from the organisers of the event.

## **AOB**

It was noted that at the next Committee meeting, roles will be allocated for the 2015-16 season. A small number of people have already approached us enquiring about joining the Committee, and (during the summer recess) members will be invited to put their names forward for election to the committee at the September AGM.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.48pm.

## Appendix 1 to Flamsteed Committee minutes 21 May 2015

Dear all,

After much negotiation we have finally received a proposal from the museum regarding our membership fees going forward. I believe that this proposal will be acceptable to the committee, but wanted to give you early sight of it, prior to our committee meeting on Thursday evening.

To remind you, the current Flamsteed membership fees are as follows:

- Single: £80 (£50 RMG + £30 FAS)
- Joint: £120 (£70 RMG + £50 FAS)
- Concessions: £63 (£35 RMG + £28 FAS)

As you are aware, the museum have abolished the concessionary rate, meaning that a significant proportion of our membership would be paying more money in the future, even with the reduced museum membership fees for single and joint members. Thankfully, the museum have agreed to allow the Flamsteed to retain a concessionary rate, and are proposing a figure that means that none of our members are worse off than they are today, and the vast majority will be better off.

These are the proposed membership fees:

- Single (non-direct debit): £74 (£44 RMG + £30 FAS) a **saving** of £6
- Single (direct debit): £69 (£39 RMG + £30 FAS) a **saving** of £11
- Joint (non-direct debit): £115 (£65 RMG + £50 FAS) a **saving** of £5
- Joint (direct debit): £110 (£60 RMG + £50 FAS) a **saving** of £10
- Concessions (non-direct debit): £63 (£44 RMG [single] + £19 FAS) the **same price** as today
- Concessions (direct debit): £58 (£39 RMG [single] + £19 FAS) a **saving** of £5

This proposal will reduce our income by around £1,000 per annum, which leaves us still running a small surplus.

In addition, the museum have left it to our discretion on whether we continue with the 3-month lapsed period for members whose memberships have expired. We can discuss whether we wish to adjust this time period in our meeting on Thursday.

Hopefully you'll agree that we've achieved all that we set out to do with this proposal, ensuring that none of our members are worse off due to the changes to the membership fee structure, and that the vast majority (80% plus, depending on direct debit take up) will be better off.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Mike.

Mike Meynell

## **Appendix 2 to Flamsteed Committee Minutes 21 May 2015**

In our committee meeting last night, there was a request for the list of donations that we made to the ROG during the last round of purchases. The list can be found below:

- ASI 120mm Colour Imaging Camera
- ASI 120mm Monochrome Imaging Camera
- Astronomik Pro Planet 742nm filter
- Baader Cool Ceramic Herschel Wedge (visual)
- Baader DADOS spectrograph
- Baader UV/IR 1.25 inch cut filter
- High Impact Peli cases x 4
- Orion 9x50 RA CI Illuminated
- Orion USA 1.25"/2" centering adapter
- Orion USA 20mm Illuminated Crosshair eyepiece
- Televue Nagler 31mm eyepiece
- Televue Panoptic 41mm eyepiece
- Televue Powermate 2x 2-inch + T-ring

I understand that all of this equipment has now been delivered. The total donation came to around £3,650 + VAT (£4,380).