

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on 19th October 2015 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Mike Meynell (Vice Chairman), Grey Liple (Vice Chairman), Andy Sawers, Christina Chester, Brian Evans, Clive Inglis, Asra Jilani, Nick Phillips, Lin Potter, Rupert Smith and Sumitra Sri Bhashyam

Apologies: Malcolm Porter (Chairman), Brian Blake, Mike Dryland, Tej Dyal and Roger Geeson

The meeting was chaired by Mike Meynell who welcomed the committee members to the first meeting of the season.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on 9th September 2015

Radio equipment installation

Unfortunately there has been no further progress since last month: the Alt-Az building is still unusable for electronic equipment.

IAU 'Name an Exosystem' competition

The deadline for the competition is 31 October so Christina Chester urged anyone who hasn't voted for the Flamsteed's suggested names should do so.

Herstmonceux

Some 25 Flamsteed members attended the Herstmonceux BBQ which received somewhat more mixed reviews than had been the case last year. There was some negative feedback about the value for money and the organisation. Not all shared that view, however. It was noted that the £20 ticket cost included an element of fund-raising for the science centre, and wasn't just intended to cover the cost of food. Some relatively simple improvements – eg, greater clarity about where things were taking place, the time of the lecture, etc – would have helped. We will relay feedback to the Wealden if it is asked for or if we are invited back again next year.

Unused telescopes

There is still no progress on the cupboard full of unused telescopes at the ROG, though we have been assured that the matter has not been forgotten by ROG management. This has been raised again with RMG general manager Lance Bourne.

Visits

We have learned that the specialist astronomy tour operator that we were planning to approach regarding our proposed visit to Florence is no longer in business. The operation appears to have been sold to a more generic tour operator, though it's possible they may carry on doing astronomy-related tours.

Lin Potter will investigate whether there are other potential operators that could relieve us of the organisational burden.

2. Committee roles and responsibilities

The list of committee members' roles is in the attached appendix. The membership secretary position is still to be confirmed, with Mike Meynell carrying out the main duties for the time being while we work through the ongoing (but improving) data challenges in the RMG's membership department.

Asra Jilani may take on the role of membership secretary during the course of the season, as she will soon commence working in the museum membership department on a part-time basis.

We may seek out a volunteer from the general membership to assist with the lecture refreshment duties.

For the History of Astronomy group – which has an upcoming visit to the Royal Astronomical Society library on 30 October – Mike Dryland will be recommencing scheduling events after Christmas, assisted where necessary by Malcolm Porter.

We hope that Flamsteed member Barry Cassels will be accepted as an official RMG volunteer and we hope to also co-opt him onto the Flamsteed committee. It is expected that he and Rupert Smith would then assist Nick Phillips with the organisation of Great Equatorial viewings.

While the organisation of visits currently falls into the lap of the most appropriate committee member, depending on the type of visit, the committee decided that it would be helpful to have one person take overall responsibility for organising visits so as to help maintain the momentum. Clive Inglis has volunteered for this new role. Clive will email Peter Doherty at the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory, to thank him for his kind hospitality during our recent tour of the site.

3. Bookings at Flamsteed lectures – walk-ups and no-shows

Our lecture in October had around 115 members in attendance. There was almost no spare seating. 106 people booked to attend. There were 16 no-shows but 25 walk-ups on the night.

While our lecture email to members says that booking in advance is a way of guaranteeing a seat, it clearly isn't. Moreover, while the lectures are open only to Flamsteed members – and certainly most attendees are, indeed, Flamsteed members – there is no guarantee that that is the case.

At the same time, we know of instances where members have booked on the website but their name has not appeared on the tick list at the door.

While in ordinary circumstances it might be desirable for members to identify themselves as Flamsteed members by showing their card at entry, not every member even has a membership card. And RMG does not know which members have not been issued with a card.

The committee is concerned that a very popular speaker could attract a considerable number of non-Flamsteed members but it is not possible to identify non-members when they show up.

The matter will be discussed with RMG's membership director Chris Hill. The committee was clear that we do not want to be in a position where we are turning away Flamsteed members whose names are not on the list of those who have pre-booked. Members will be strongly encouraged to book their seat at a lecture, with the message that we cannot guarantee entrance to the lecture theatre if they do not pre-book their seats. However, the committee still wanted the discretion to allow entrance for those who do not book, particularly if there are spare seats available. The procedure will be discussed with Chris Hill, as museum staff are responsible for policing the entrance door at our lectures.

4. Refreshments at Flamsteed lectures

While we buy refreshments, snacks, etc, we've had a problem with our supplies disappearing from the RMG lecture room kitchen. They are supposed to be kept locked up in the membership office but for some reason that doesn't appear to be happening. The committee will buy a lockable box for the kitchen.

Someone still needs to be responsible for buying supplies. Clive Inglis and Christina Chester will be back-up buyers to assist Roger Geeson and Peter Kitcherside.

We've had to buy our own 4-litre urn as the museum's was no longer serviceable.

5. Smashfest 2016

Smashfest, the science and art event for people aged 11-17 in which the Flamsteed took part last year, has asked us to take part again this year. The event takes place during the February half-term break 18-20 February, and is again at the Albany Theatre in Deptford. They would like us to commit to take part on the Friday and Saturday (19 & 20).

Mike Meynell recently met the organisers who were delighted by the Flamsteed's presence last year. This year, they have some sponsorship money that they can use to promote the event more than they could afford to do last year. The 'theme' is based around a solar storm that threatens the world. Mike suggested they also contact Stuart Clark who has written a book about the solar storm of 1859.

We are likely to proceed with four events: (1) daytime solar viewing in the grounds behind the theatre; (2) evening viewing, when Orion and the Pleiades will be on show and the Moon will be around 85-95% illuminated; (3) a project to build a spectrometer using a cereal box and an old CD; and (4) a Flamsteed astrophotography video, but with some annotation with a few basic but interesting facts so viewers will have a better idea what they're looking at.

6. Any other business

Insurance

The museum's new general manager, Lance Bourne, has been looking into the matter of insurance for Flamsteed events. Museum Secretary Chris Grey said that as a result, every Flamsteed event that takes place off museum premises has to have a risk management assessment filed beforehand or they will not be covered.

Mike Meynell has completed these assessments for all currently-scheduled Flamsteed events for 2015-16.

Under-18s

This issue overlaps to some extent the earlier discussion about walk-ups.

Although this issue has been raised with the museum on numerous occasions, we believe that there are still at least two under-age members of the Flamsteed. Chris Hill has apparently reminded staff that they cannot sell Flamsteed membership to under-18s.

Andy Sawers presented a paper on the problems created by the presence of people under the age of 18, in particular at Flamsteed lectures. In summary, there are three main issues:

- What can we do to minimise the likelihood that people under the age of 18 will try to attend a Flamsteed event – and what are we to do with them if they show up? Do we admit them on an exceptional basis or do we have to turn them away?
- Looking further ahead, should the Flamsteed decide to change its policy and admit under-18s as members? There are a number of pros and cons in doing so. Alternatively, a separately-constituted 'junior society' might be an alternative option, though there are issues revolving around the demand for such a separate group and the resources that would be necessary.
- Overarching these two issues are the very serious child protection measures that would likely be necessary. It is not entirely clear, for example, if our child protection responsibilities would be fulfilled even if we were to admit an under-18 on an exceptional basis on the condition that they are accompanied by a parent.

The Federation of Astronomical Societies has compiled a 17-page set of guidelines on child protection measures and it is clear from these that the measures are very serious and potentially onerous.

The committee decided not to discuss the paper in any detail tonight, but feedback would be welcomed in the coming days and weeks. Andy and Christina Chester will take this paper as a platform from which to look further into what our obligations are, the short-term practical issues which they will discuss with the museum, as well as to look at the longer term options for the society.

The child protection issues are very delicate and yet it was thought that the museum no longer offered relevant training to museum volunteers.

The committee stated that it was the museum's responsibility, not the Flamsteed's, to enforce the under-18 policy. The committee also agreed that it was the museum's responsibility to police the entrance door at our lectures.

Any change of policy would require a vote by the membership.

Astrophotography evening

ROG astronomer Brendan Owens is running an astrophotography evening on 28 November and has asked the Flamsteed if we would like to be involved. The committee said we would be very pleased to. It will be a ticketed event.

Microphones

We sometimes have a problem with people at the back of the lecture not being able to hear questions from people at the front. We have two possible options: (i) arrange a couple of mics that point to the audience during Q&A; (ii) use a hand mic for questions from people in the front couple of rows. We will try one or other of these options at the next lecture.

16th anniversary

This year marks the Flamsteed Astronomy Society's 16th anniversary. Christina Chester thought it might be nice if we did some sort of celebratory thing to mark the occasion, perhaps at Christmas.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 9.04pm

FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY - ROLES

Role	Description	Procedure Document	Performed by
Chair	Acts as the embodiment of the FAS for all external matters. Takes the chair at all meetings of the FAS and committee at which he/she is present.		Malcolm Porter
Vice-Chair	Assumes the duties of the Chair when the Chair is unable to attend. Focusing on internal affairs (administration, lecture bookings, observing evening coordination and the website, etc).		Mike Meynell
Vice-Chair	Assumes the duties of the Chair when the Chair is unable to attend. Focusing on external affairs such as liaison with the ROG, solar viewing and radio astronomy, as well as media liaison.		Grey Lipley
Committee Secretary	Takes & publishes minutes and issues notices of meetings and agendas for committee and general meetings. Receives nominations for committee membership and proposals for resolutions. Organises elections for committee membership.	Committee meetings Annual General Meeting	Andy Sawers
Programme Secretary	Agreeing the lecture topics, approaching potential lecturers, and booking lecturers for each lecture date.	Lecture events	Brian Blake
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.	Lecture events	Christina Chester
Membership Secretary	Works with the NMM Members Office to answer enquiries, resolve subscription issues, welcome new members, and track membership numbers and meeting attendance.		TBC - Mike Meynell temporarily covering
Web Editor	Organises hosting etc for the FAS website. Arranges design of the website as agreed with the committee. Coordinates provision, editing and upload of reports, articles, photographs and updates.		Mike Meynell Christina Chester
Forum Moderators	Moderates the Flamsteed online forum. Ensures that no abusive messages are posted. Splits discussion topics where necessary.		Andy Sawers Mike Meynell
Lecture and Event Reports	Writing of lecture reports and other event reports for the website		Andy Sawers Clive Inglis
Social Media Coordinator	Organises social media accounts as agreed with the committee (Twitter, Facebook, SMS, LinkedIn, etc). Proposes & coordinates contributions.		Christina Chester Sumitra Sri Bhashyam
Social Organisers	Provide refreshments and catering at meetings and events as required.		Roger Geeson Peter Kitcherside
Society Trips Organiser	Takes overall responsibility for organising society trips.		Clive Inglis
Radio Astronomy Group Organiser	Organises and runs meetings of the Radio Astronomy Group	Radio Astronomy Group meeting	Brian Evans
Radio Astronomy Group Assistants	Assists in the organisation of the Radio Astronomy Group	Radio Astronomy Group meeting	Tej Dyal Clive Inglis
History of Astronomy Group Organiser	Organises and runs meetings of the History of Astronomy Group	History of Astronomy Group meeting	Mike Dryland

Observing and Imaging Group Organiser	Organises and runs meetings of the Observing and Imaging Group. Plan, schedule and arrange observing events. Ensure provision of equipment and qualified leaders at each session. Coordinate announcements, SMS, and web postings etc.		Rupert Smith
Observing and Imaging Coordinators	Organises and coordinates specific observing events (e.g. Romney observing) where bookings need to be taken and travel arrangements made. Organises society and public workshops at the ROG and elsewhere (telescope / imaging workshops).	Romney Observing Sessions Workshop events	Nick Phillips
Observing and Imaging Assistants	Assists with the organisation of meetings of the Observing and Imaging Group. Helps with the provision of equipment and assists in the running of the sessions.		Tej Dyal Grey Liple Clive Inglis
Pub Evenings Organiser	Organises and hosts monthly pub evenings	Pub evenings	Brian Evans
Solar Viewing Events Organiser	Organises and runs solar viewing sessions	Solar viewing sessions	Nick Phillips
Solar Viewing Events Assistants	Assists with the organisation of solar viewing sessions	Solar viewing sessions	Roger Geeson Tej Dyal Andy Sawers Grey Liple
Great Equatorial Telescope Viewing Events Organiser	Organises and runs the Flamsteed viewing events with the Great Equatorial Telescope	28-inch viewing sessions	Nick Phillips
Great Equatorial Telescope Viewing Events Assistants	Assists in the running of the Flamsteed viewing events with the Great Equatorial Telescope	28-inch viewing sessions	Tej Dyal Rupert Smith
Astrophotography Video Compiler	Coordinates the receipt of astrophotography images taken by Flamsteed members and compiles a video of the best images for display at Flamsteed lectures and other Flamsteed events		Andy Sawers