

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Monday 24th October 2016 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Christina Chester (vice-chair), Asra Jilani, Brian Evans, Clive Inglis, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Sumitra Sri Bhashyam, Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Grey Libley (vice-chair), Brian Blake, Lin Potter, Roger Geeson, Rupert Smith.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on 6th September 2016

Alt-Az pavilion and radio astronomy equipment

Due to budgetary constraints, no work has taken place within the alt-azimuth pavilion. This is unlikely to change until the start of the new financial year.

Andy asked if there was an alternate site within the museum to place the radio astronomy equipment. When Clive and Mike performed a site visit last year, the alt-az pavilion was the only viable option. It was agreed that we would raise this topic again with Lance Bourne at the Royal Observatory.

Membership office

There have been lots of changes in the membership department at the museum since our last meeting. Chris Hill, the former Membership Manager, has now left the museum to join the National Trust. Jonathan Seal, Membership Officer, informed us that he is also leaving the museum in November to join the Churches Conservation Trust. Finally, Sara Orlandi, Membership Officer, has left the museum.

Tessa Mo in the membership office will be looking after our lecture evenings until a new appointment is made. Chloe Chapman started as the new membership manager last week.

The committee passed on their thanks to the outgoing membership team, and looked forward to working with Chloe and her team in the future. Andy and Christina will be setting up a meeting with Chloe in the very near future. We will also invite Chloe to the next Flamsteed lecture.

Book signings

The book signings at Lewis Dartnell's lecture went reasonably well. There were some concerns raised about the arrangements on the evening, as members had to walk over to the main desk to purchase the book, before bringing the book back to Lewis to sign. Lewis also made comments that the arrangements could have been better organised.

Mike raised the idea of making the book sales cash only, with the museum accounting for all the cash at the end of the evening. It was agreed that we would discuss this procedure with Lance at our next meeting, in order to work out a more efficient process.

Under-18s

No further progress has been made given the recent personnel changes in the membership department.

2. Appointment of co-opted committee members

The committee were pleased to appoint Asra Jilani, Lin Potter and Sumitra Sri Bhashyam as co-opted members until the next Flamsteed AGM in September 2017.

Mike Dryland, after many years of service on the committee, has decided to step down from his co-opted role. The committee placed on record a vote of thanks to Mike Dryland for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the society over many years. Without Mike's drive and determination, the society would not be as successful as it is today. Mike has agreed to act as an advisor for any issues that we may wish to discuss, for which we thank him.

3. Proposal for a Practical Astronomy Group

There have been concerns about the longevity of the Radio Astronomy Group, with a drop in participation rates and attendance at workshops. In addition, the society has suffered from a lack of forward planning for our other workshops, including telescope workshops, astrophotography workshops and the potential offering of spectroscopy in the future.

Mike Meynell took the group through a proposal for a new "Practical Astronomy Group" which could incorporate the existing Observing & Imaging and Radio Astronomy groups. For the moment, the proposal just incorporates the education aspect of practical astronomy, with a view to reviewing whether the observing programme could be incorporated at a later date if the new arrangements are successful.

The new arrangements would work as follows:

- At the start of each season (or earlier), a small group of committee members with an interest in practical astronomy meet to decide the programme for the coming season.
- A series of (say) 10 dates (approximately one per month) is agreed.
- The group decides on which topics to cover in the Practical Astronomy Group over the coming season. This could include:
 - Telescope workshop
 - Basic astrophotography (DSLR, star trails, wide angle shots, etc)
 - More advanced astrophotography (probably x 2 or 3, depending on the number of topics we want to cover; i.e. solar system, deep sky, solar, etc)
 - Spectroscopy
 - Meteor detection
 - Solar flare detection
 - Anything else that takes our fancy!
- We decide on a venue for each meeting (normally either the ROG or Mycenae House).
- We decide on who should deliver the content for each evening - either an internal Flamsteed resource, or an external resource (including someone from the ROG) if we decide it would be worthwhile.
- We can also have events that have more than one delivery resource where it makes sense to do so.
- For example, at the solar viewing session in May this year, we kicked off the meeting with a "general solar science" presentation by an ROG resource, followed by a practical session

with Flamsteed resources. This meant that the session was of interest to more than just those people who wanted to know about the practical details.

- Whoever is coordinating these events then acts on the instructions of the group meeting; contacting speakers, booking venues, setting up bookings for members, etc.

We can also ask the general membership what topics they would like to cover, and if anyone would be interested in hosting a workshop. More informal sessions with a number of participants could also work well. This will, most likely, naturally happen as the group progresses. Perhaps for the first season, we try to schedule everything amongst members of the committee, but try to broaden our network in time for next season.

It is important that the sessions are kept as informal as possible, with as much member participation that we can encompass in the allotted time. Clearly, time pressures at the ROG mean that this is kept to a minimum, but there are no such time pressures at Mycenae House. Venue choice is therefore key to the success of certain events. Some events, however, could still work well at the ROG.

There were some concerns raised that we may lose momentum in certain topics by focussing on basic introductions, but find ourselves unable to build on this knowledge with more advanced workshops to give members some progression in the subjects concerned. Mike responded by indicating that this was key to the forward planning of the group. We had to respond to member demand, encourage members to communicate with each other, making better use of the Flamsteed forums to encourage debate and sharing of knowledge. If discussion builds up on the forums and in other member communications, the group can respond to this potential demand when deciding on the future programme.

The committee agreed to the proposal and an initial meeting of the group will be scheduled in the next few weeks.

4. Refreshments at Lectures

After many years of service, Peter Kitcherside has decided to step down from his role in helping to provide refreshments at our lectures. The committee placed on record their thanks to Peter for his fantastic service over the years. It was noted that Peter attended the last lecture, and still ended up “behind the counter” serving refreshments, which was great to see.

However, we need a more robust system of finding volunteers for this task. Fortunately, Roger has agreed to continue with his role, and has also persuaded Sue & Bob Yates to help out at the lectures. The committee thanked all concerned. Christina agreed to draw up a back-up volunteer list for the lectures, in case Roger, Sue & Bob are not available.

5. Committee roles and responsibilities

Andy stated that the committee needed to spread the load of tasks across more volunteers. However, he wanted to ensure that nobody felt under pressure to take when taking on extra roles, and that adequate support was given where people having difficulties performing a task.

The following roles and responsibilities were agreed for the 2016/17 season:

Category	Event type	Role description	2016-17 volunteers
Lectures & learning	Programme secretary	Agreeing the lecture topics, approaching potential lecturers, and booking lecturers for each lecture date	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	Nick Phillips
	Social organiser	Provide refreshments and catering at meetings and events as required	Roger Geeson, Sue Yates, Bob Yates, Brian Evans, Tej Dyal
	History of astronomy group organiser	Organises and runs meetings of the History of Astronomy Group	Malcolm Porter, with assistance from Mike Dryland
	Trips organiser	Takes overall responsibility for organising society trips	Clive Inglis, Christina Chester
Observing	Blackheath observing 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

Category	Event type	Role description	2016-17 volunteers
	Other observing: Romney, Leeds, Cudham, etc. (potentially Otford in future)	Organises and coordinates specific observing events (e.g. Romney observing) where bookings need to be taken and travel arrangements made	Romney – Asra Jilani Other events – to be confirmed when venues are decided
	Observing 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, Mike Meynell
	Solar - public	Organises and runs public solar viewing sessions	Tej Dyal, assisted by Nick Phillips
	Solar - members	Organises and runs members only solar viewing sessions	Clive Inglis, assisted by Nick Phillips
	Solar viewing assistants	Assists with the organisation of solar viewing sessions	Roger Geeson, Tej Dyal, Andy Sawers, Grey Liple, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips
	Great Equatorial	Organises and runs the Flamsteed viewing events with the Great Equatorial Telescope	Tej Dyal
	Great Equatorial assistants	Assists in the running of the Flamsteed viewing events with the Great Equatorial Telescope	Tej Dyal, Clive Inglis, Nick Phillips, Mike Meynell
Practical	Telescope workshops	Organises society and public workshops at the ROG and elsewhere (telescope / imaging workshops)	Practical Astronomy Group
	Astrophotography workshops (telescope, DSLR, CCD)	Organises society and public workshops at the ROG and elsewhere (telescope / imaging workshops)	Practical Astronomy Group
	Spectroscopy workshops	Organises society workshops on spectroscopy	Practical Astronomy Group
	Radio astronomy workshops	Organises and runs radio astronomy meetings	Practical Astronomy Group
Outreach	Smashfest, APOTY, Shrewsbury Park, etc	Organises outreach events on behalf of the society	Andy Sawers
Social Evenings	Pub evenings organiser	Organises and hosts monthly pub evenings	Brian Evans

Role	Role description	2016-17 volunteers
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	Andy Sawers
Vice Chairs	Assumes the duties of the Chair when the Chair is unable to attend	Christina Chester, 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	Mike Meynell
Membership Secretary	Works with the NMM Members Office to answer enquiries, resolve subscription issues, welcome new members, and track membership numbers and meeting attendance	Welcome new members - Asra Jilani; Membership list - Mike Meynell, Christina Chester
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, Sumitra Sri Bhashyam
Forum Moderators	Moderates the Flamsteed online forum. Ensures that no abusive messages are posted. Splits discussion topics where necessary	Mike Meynell, Andy Sawers
Lecture and Event Reports	Writing of lecture reports and other event reports for the website	Andy Sawers
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, Andy Sawers
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
Management of Flamsteed e-mail Account	Responding to enquiries made to the Flamsteed email account	Mike Meynell, Christina Chester, Andy Sawers

6. Unused telescopes at the Royal Observatory Greenwich

There are several unused telescopes at the Royal Observatory, which are in various states of repair. Mike visited the museum in May 2015 to inspect these telescopes, and determined that a few are useable, and others may be made useable by cannibalising parts from other scopes and mounts. The museum would now like us to re-inspect the telescopes, with a view to using them in school outreach activities, and also for the potential benefit of Flamsteed members.

A session has been arranged for Friday 11 November 2016, at 3pm, to inspect the scopes. There is no budget for repairs, but the museum have agreed that we can take the scopes off-site in order to undertake our own repairs.

7. Flamsteed access to the Altazimuth Pavilion at the Royal Observatory Greenwich

Christina updated the committee on a meeting with Brendan Owens and Nick Babbs at the Royal Observatory. They have offered to allow small groups of Flamsteed members to go on tours of the Altazimuth Pavilion and other, normally closed, areas of the museum. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea. Mike suggested that Christina contact Mike Dryland and Grey Liple, as they had done tours of the Altazimuth Pavilion in the past, and had some material that could be used.

8. Any other business

- i) E-Eye Trip: Rupert has proposed a trip to the E-Eye facility, near Seville in Spain. The cost of the trip would be a maximum of £400 per person, assuming a 2-night stay. Nick stated that he had met the people from E-Eye, and had seen photographs of the site. The skies are extremely dark, and the facility is very well equipped. The committee agreed to pursue an initial feasibility trip, with a small group of attendees from the committee, before opening up future trips to the general membership.

- ii) Astrophotography challenge: Before the first lecture of the season, Bobby Manoo came up with the idea of an astrophotography challenge for our members to attempt each month. There was also the idea of having an “astro-photograph of the month” based on the submissions received. So that this isn’t seen as divisive, the committee agreed that this would be a “chairman’s choice of the month”. In addition, we could produce an annual calendar of images from Flamsteed members, which could be sold prior to the Christmas lecture. The committee agreed that this was worth pursuing, and that Andy and Christina raise the subject in their meetings with Chloe Chapman and Lance Bourne at the museum.

- iii) Signed book from lectures: Andy has been asking each of our lecturers to sign a copy of the latest Astronomy Photographer of the Year book over the course of the season. At the end of the June lecture, we propose to have a raffle across the membership with the prize being this book. The proceeds of the raffle would go to a worthy cause (related to astronomy, and ideally local to the society), to be decided.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.10pm.