

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 2nd March 2017 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, Roger Geeson, Rupert Smith, Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Grey Liple (vice-chair), Brian Blake, Lin Potter, Sumitra Sri Bhashyam.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on 24th October 2016

Alt-Az pavilion and radio astronomy equipment

Christina updated the committee on a meeting that took place at the museum, with Brendan Owens and Nick Babbs. We understand that the museum will be performing some conservation work on the alt-az pavilion this year. Following this work, the museum would like to start discussions on installing radio astronomy equipment in the location that we previously discussed.

The committee noted that discussions on this topic had been ongoing for some time, so it was hoped that we could now reach a conclusion. Brian Evans and Clive agreed to take part in any further meetings with the museum.

Under-18s

We understand that the museum membership database does have the facility to hold the date of birth of members, which would obviously be a requirement to identify any potential members under the age of 18. Andy and Christina will be taking part in further discussions with the membership team at the museum to determine the way forward.

Proposal for a Practical Astronomy Group

Mike reported that the group had run three meetings so far, all of which have been very well attended (telescope, solar system imaging and introduction to astrophotography workshops). All meetings had taken place at Mycenae House and were fully booked.

Three further events will take place over the course of the remainder of the season – a Deep Sky Imaging workshop in April, an Introduction to Radio Astronomy workshop in May and a Solar Imaging session (also in May).

With the number of events planned for the remainder of the season, it hasn't been possible to schedule an event to introduce Spectroscopy as a topic, so this will be deferred until next season.

Refreshments at Lectures

No issues have been reported with refreshments at lectures and the current arrangements are working well.

Committee roles and responsibilities – Great Equatorial viewing events

Tej updated the committee on the Great Equatorial Viewing events that he has helped to organise for the first time. In summary, there were eight events spanning 3 months (from 15 November to 28 February). Our members could view the night sky on 4 out of the 8 sessions, which is a vast improvement on the 2015/16 season.

For 5 out of the 8 sessions, the event was fully booked. Only one event was poorly attended (7 February), which was only booked to half-capacity. This was most likely because it was the third session in 3 weeks. We must work with the dates given by the museum, so this was unfortunately unavoidable.

The committee thanked Tej for all his efforts in running the sessions this season. Tej passed on his thanks to Nick P and Barry Cassels for their assistance in running the events. The committee noted that it was better to run the sessions with 2 volunteers wherever possible, so efforts will continue to encourage volunteers to put their names forward to help. Clive reiterated that he was happy to help with the sessions.

Committee roles and responsibilities – History of Astronomy group

Malcolm reported that all the talks and trips for the History of Astronomy group are in place for the remainder of the season, and all have been advertised on the website.

Unused telescopes at the Royal Observatory Greenwich

Mike reported that there were a small number of telescopes that were usable. However, we had not heard back from the museum about next steps. We had previously talked about the ability for members to borrow the telescopes for a short period of time, if they didn't currently have a telescope, for use on Blackheath and at other observing events.

Christina agreed follow this up with the museum to determine what they want to do with the telescopes.

Flamsteed access to the Altazimuth Pavilion at the Royal Observatory Greenwich

Christina reported that 4 tours had been arranged for Flamsteed members on Saturday 25 March, with Mike Dryland and Grey Liplely hosting the events.

The committee thanked Christina for organising the events, and Mike D and Grey for leading the tours.

E-Eye trip

Rupert reported back on the trip to E-Eye in Spain. Apart from a few timing issues with regards tours encroaching on observing time, the trip went extremely well. All who attended thoroughly enjoyed the trip and thanked Rupert for making the arrangements.

Rupert said that there had been some negotiation over the final price of the trip, so he would ensure that the costs were fixed for future trips. By the end of this year, there will be more accommodation available on-site, which will reduce the cost per head. The ideal date for the next trip would be September, or prior to June.

2. Plans for public and members-only solar viewing events

As we are now coming up to the summer period, we need to start planning for the public and members-only solar viewing events. In the past, we have offered 4 evening event during the months of June and July for Flamsteed members only; and around 10-12 public events on a Friday / Saturday during the period of June to August.

Clive agreed to organise the member solar viewing events; and Tej agreed to organise the public solar viewing events. Nick and Mike agreed to assist in the planning.

Last season, we held a one-off event at the ROG to encourage members to volunteer at public solar viewing sessions. This consisted of a talk about solar physics from Brendan Owens, followed by a talk about solar observing from one of the existing volunteers demonstrating how to set up a solar telescope and how the public sessions are organised.

Christina reported that the museum was planning to run some daytime lunar viewing sessions, so we may be able to combine a solar viewing session on the same date. Nick agreed to approach Nick Babbs and Brendan Owens to plan some dates for the public solar viewing sessions.

3. ROG's Science Fact -vs- Science Fiction event in May

Christina reported that the ROG are planning a Science Fact -vs- Science Fiction event, which is due to take place in May. The museum would like the Flamsteed to be involved in some capacity. The committee agreed that we would assist if possible, but it wasn't clear what we could do. When further information is available about the event, we might have a better idea on what we could contribute.

4. Society trips

Clive had contacted the Bayfordbury Observatory at the University of Hertfordshire. Unfortunately, they are fully booked until the end of this season and bookings would not re-open until September. The committee agreed that the tour looked interesting, and Clive agreed to contact Bayfordbury Observatory again in September.

Clive had not had any success in contacting Lucie Green at the Mullard Space Science Laboratory, but would keep trying to see if we could arrange a tour.

Mike raised the idea of visiting the National Space Science centre in Leicester. The minimum group size was 15, and a 20% deposit was required in advance. The "Jupiter" package was £10 per head. The site was easy to access via public transport, and parking was not an issue for people who wanted to drive. The committee agreed that it was a good idea, and Mike agreed to try to organise a trip for around 30 people which would take place on a weekend in June (most likely a Saturday). Malcolm and Clive agreed to assist, if needed.

5. Links with Crayford Manor House Astronomical Society (CMHAS)

We have been contacted by Janice McLean, who is a member of both the Flamsteed and CMHAS, about forging links between the two societies. The committee agreed that it would be a good idea to build links, and Christina agreed to contact CMHAS to take this forward.

Malcolm raised the idea of forging links with the Orpington Astronomical Society, particularly in relation to sharing an observing evening in Otford. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea, so Malcolm would take this forward.

6. Raffle for autographed Astronomy Photographer of the Year book

Andy reminded the committee that he had provided a copy of the latest Astronomy Photographer of the Year book, which all our lecturers had signed. The question now was how we should organise giving this book as a prize to one of our members.

There was considerable debate on whether there was a worthy cause to which any money raised from a raffle could be given. It wasn't possible to reach a conclusion, so Andy agreed to come up with some options which he would circulate after the committee meeting.

7. Awareness of Flamsteed Special Interest Group emails

There are separate mailing lists for the History of Astronomy, Observing & Imaging, and Radio Astronomy special interest groups. Andy asked about how we make members aware of the existence of these groups. Mike stated that new members were made aware of the groups when they initially join the society. Mike asked if the separate mailing lists were still required, or if it would be better if all messages went to all Flamsteed members.

Christina stated that it was key to manage the amount of communication which goes to members so that members were not deluged with emails. Malcolm felt that it was important that we retain a way of targeting communications to members who were interested in certain topics.

Tej reminded the committee that it was important that we push the usage of the Flamsteed forums to encourage members to discuss the events within the special interest groups.

One idea was for a single email to go to members each month which covers all the forthcoming events. Follow-up / reminder emails for each event would be sent as normal. Christina suggested that we trial this idea from the start of the next season (September) until Christmas. The committee agreed that this would be a good approach.

The committee also agreed that we should look at running a survey of all members to determine their interests. Andy and Malcolm agreed to come up with a list of questions for this survey.

8. Committee update on:

Radio Astronomy data (from members)

The museum is interested in the radio astronomy data currently collected by members. Christina agreed to set up a meeting between the museum and Brian Evans / Clive to discuss this further.

Potential listing project with Library

The museum is looking for volunteers to help with a library listing project. Christina will update the committee when further details become available.

Team Brief

The Flamsteed have been invited to contribute to the museum "Team Brief" newsletter. Christina is writing an article on our recent History of Astronomy group trip to the LTE stores.

BSA's Run the Solar System event

The Flamsteed have agreed to take part in a solar observing event at the Olympic Park on 11 March. Christina is organising the event and several committee members have agreed to take part.

9. Any Other Business

Friends of Shrewsbury Park event

Once again, we have been contacted by the Friends of Shrewsbury Park about taking part in their summer festival, which is due to take place on Sunday 9th July. Apparently, the dog show will take place on the same day as the main festival this year, which should mean that attendance is improved.

The committee agreed that we should take part, and Mike agreed to help organise the event.

Museum Attendance at Committee Meetings

The museum have a right to nominate two non-voting committee members, but the committee noted that we hadn't had an attendee from the museum in the last few years. The committee was satisfied with the current arrangements and agreed that we could specifically invite a museum representative to a committee meeting if it was necessary to discuss a topic of mutual interest.

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