

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 21st February 2018 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Christina Chester (vice-chair), Barry Cassels, Clive Inglis, Helen Edwards, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Roger Geeson, Rupert Smith, Simon Hurst, Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Grey Liple (vice-chair), Asra Jilani, Bobby Manoo, Brian Blake, Nick Phillips.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on 9th October 2017

Membership Survey

Andy distributed a draft membership survey for comments prior to distribution to society members. The survey was split into five sections: about you, about your involvement in Flamsteed events, about your interests in astronomy, about your membership of the RMG, and about how we communicate with you.

Andy asked for comments to be sent to him via email and is open to ideas on how to improve the questionnaire. He suggested that this year's signed Astronomy Photographer of the Year book is offered as the prize to members to boost the response rate.

The suggestion was to use either Survey Monkey or Google Forms as a delivery mechanism. It was agreed to get the museum membership department to review the survey prior to distribution.

Kent Wildlife Trust

Rupert reported that the Kent Wildlife Trust have closed their visitor centre with a view to turning it into an education centre to be used on an infrequent basis. They may continue to hold events, but he had not had any contact recently.

Practical Astronomy Group

Mike reported that we had run two workshops so far this season, and all the other workshops are scheduled and expected to be held as planned.

Trips

Rupert reported that he had to organise dates for a potential trip to E-Eye in Spain. The earliest date for a trip would be May.

The committee thanked Clive and Christina for their parts in organising the recent trip to the Bayfordbury Observatory at the University of Hertfordshire. The trip was a great success.

Clive stated that he hadn't made any progress on organising a trip to La Palma, so he would look at pushing this forward later in the year. He mentioned that a visitor centre is currently being built at the observatory, which is due to be completed later this year.

Clive reported that he had been in touch with Peter Doherty at the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory in Cambridge, and he had agreed that we could visit in April or May of this year. The committee agreed that a trip in May would be preferable, due to better weather, so Clive agreed to take this forward.

Members' Talks

Christina reported that we currently had 2 volunteers to speak for the event due to take place on Tuesday 1 May. She would continue to ask for volunteers, so that we could have 3 or 4 speakers on the evening.

North Essex Astronomy Society

Christina reported that the North Essex Astronomy Society were still keen to visit the Royal Observatory, so she would contact Nick Babbs at the Royal Observatory to find some suitable dates.

2. Under-18s update

Andy gave the committee an update on admitting under-18s to membership of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society. We had finally got suitable wording inserted into the Federation of Astronomical Societies (FedAstro) public liability insurance policy. The original wording excluded persons under the age of 18. The insurers have now agreed to cover those under the age of 18, providing a safeguarding policy is in place.

The policy only covers the United Kingdom, so wouldn't cover overseas trips.

Andy sent the policy details to Lance Bourne at the Royal Observatory. Lance has suggested changing the Flamsteed's Memorandum of Understanding with the museum so that our events off museum premises would be covered by the FedAstro public liability insurance policy, whereas on-premise events would continue to be covered by the museum's insurance policy.

However, the museum would not advise us on whether the FedAstro public liability insurance policy gives us sufficient coverage. Committee members expressed deep concern at this, particularly as we are members of Royal Museums Greenwich, and the society exists only as part of the membership organisation of the museum. The Flamsteed is not a separately constituted society. This could mean that, if the FedAstro policy turns out not to cover us in certain circumstances, then committee members would be personally liable for any incidents which may occur.

The consensus was that this was an unacceptable situation, and Andy agreed to take this back to the museum for further discussion. We have a workable solution at present, with the museum agreeing to cover external events, providing a risk assessment has been completed and a committee member attends every event. If this situation changes, then there is little choice but to cease external events, which will threaten the whole future of the society.

3. Update on alt-azimuth pavilion

Christina reported that she and Andy had a recent meeting with Brendan Owens at the Royal Observatory and were given an update on the equipment purchases for the alt-azimuth pavilion restoration. The equipment is due to arrive at the end of March, with work currently underway on the exterior fabric of the building.

Brendan has some concerns about interference by lighting for any radio astronomy equipment which might be installed. Clive stated that he was happy to advise if Brendan contacted him.

4. Feedback from History of Astronomy Group sessions

In Bobby's absence, Mike provided an update on these sessions based on an email received from Bobby prior to the meeting.

Bobby reported that:

- The proposal for opening the invites to the general Flamsteed membership has worked well. We have had great turnout thus far and he anticipates that this trend will continue for the remaining sessions. He therefore proposed that we continue with this approach. The committee agreed to continue with sending invites to the whole membership.
- He does not have any issues to raise regarding the remaining meeting. Malcolm has kindly offered to host the 6 March event, as Bobby will not be able to attend.
- He would like to start putting together a schedule for next season as Greg Smye-Rumsby has indicated that he is willing to do a talk. He can start asking around for other possibilities and has asked for any suggestions. Malcolm reported that Mike Dryland may have a talk which is nearly completed.
- Apart from a tour of the ROG "Observatory Life" exhibition in September, we have not done any specific History of Astronomy trips this season and he would like to include one next season and will be exploring options.

5. Equipment for society

Bobby has also raised the idea of purchasing equipment for the Flamsteed to help with running workshops (e.g. laptops, projectors, video cameras to record talks). Specific fundraising activities could cover the cost.

There is a reliance on a small number of people to bring equipment to help with running workshops. However, the committee noted that we had the option of hiring equipment from Mycenae House for workshops, if necessary. In addition, we normally use equipment at the Royal Observatory when running workshops there.

The committee believed that we would end up in the same situation as currently, as the equipment would have to be stored by a committee member, and we would therefore be reliant on them being in attendance. From that perspective, the committee felt that it wasn't worthwhile pursuing this proposal. We could always hire equipment in an emergency.

6. Monthly photography challenge

There has been a suggestion of turning the monthly photography challenge into a calendar or annual Flamsteed publication. Andy reported that this had been raised with the museum previously, and they stated that there is already an astronomy photographer of the year calendar, and a museum calendar, and therefore wouldn't be able to assist.

On that basis, the committee felt that we couldn't proceed.

7. Youth involvement

The committee agreed to defer discussion on this topic to the next committee meeting, given our earlier discussions on under-18s membership and insurance issues.

8. Plans for public and members-only solar viewing sessions

Mike stated that we needed to start planning for our public and members-only solar viewing sessions for the summer. There is a scheduled solar viewing training session for the evening of Tuesday 8 May at the Royal Observatory, where we would try to encourage new members to attend.

Tej agreed to help organise the public solar viewing sessions and Clive agreed to help organise the members-only solar viewing sessions.

Tej presented plans for 15 public solar viewing sessions, starting in May, and running through to September, with events on Thursdays and Saturdays.

Clive asked when the members-only sessions should begin. The committee agreed that these should commence in June and we should offer 4 events to members, all on Tuesday evenings.

9. Any other business

Perseids

Tej asked if we planning to run a Perseids Observing event in August this year. The committee agreed to look at this later in the year and potentially use Cudham as a venue as in previous seasons.

Friends of Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival

Christina reported that we had been invited to take part in the Friends of Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival once again. Clive stated that, as we have had problems in getting sufficient solar observing equipment for these events, that we change our offering to talk about the society, hold quizzes, etc. Andy had raised this idea in previous committee meetings.

The committee agreed that the Flamsteed should take part in the festival, providing sufficient volunteers can be found. Christina agreed to send out an email asking for volunteers.

Charlton & Woolwich Free Film Festival

Andy reported that the film festival is about to have a meeting on their plans for the 2018 festival. It is understood that they would like the Flamsteed to be involved, but this time with an evening event rather than solar viewing.

The committee felt that it was worthwhile talking to the festival organisers about their plans, with the hope that the 2018 event is better attended than last year's event.

New Scientist Live 2018

Christina reported that the BAA would like the Flamsteed to be involved in the 2018 event, after the success of last year.

The committee agreed that we should take part. It was commented that the Royal Observatory Greenwich had previously expressed an interest in getting involved in this event, and Christina stated that the BAA and ROG had been having discussions regarding this.

Museum social media collaboration

Christina has been dealing with the museum regarding social media collaboration. The museum have offered to promote some of our summer solar viewing events via the museum social media channels. The committee agreed that this was a good idea.

Air conditioning in the lecture theatre

Malcolm reported that the air conditioning in the February lecture wasn't working properly. Mike wondered if the issue was because the air conditioning wasn't turned on properly, as there had been issues in the past with technicians putting the air conditioning on a low setting, even when the lecture theatre is at full capacity.

Refreshments at March lecture

Roger stated that he had no assistants to help with refreshments at the March lecture. The committee agreed to seek additional volunteers to assist.

GET dome

Roger asked if the repairs to the GET dome had been completed. Christina stated that it had been completed and the scaffolding had been removed

Collection of money for trips

Clive asked what arrangements could be made to collect money for trips. Currently, we are relying on the bank accounts of committee members. The only option would be to ask the museum to set up an account on our behalf. Andy agreed to raise this with the museum for further discussion.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.50pm.