

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 23rd May 2019 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Christina Chester (vice-chair), Asra Jilani, Barry Cassels, Clive Inglis, Grey Liptey, Helen Edwards, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Roger Geeson, Simon Hurst and Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Bobby Manoo, Brian Blake and Rupert Smith.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on Wednesday 6th February 2019

Practical Astronomy Group

Mike reported that the solar imaging workshop had been cancelled as the likely attendance would have been too low to justify running the meeting. After review, it was thought that the content probably had too much overlap with the planetary imaging workshop. As a result, we will look at revamping the workshop content for next season.

Rupert has been doing some research into a Spectroscopy workshop, having spent some time in France with Shelyak Instruments (who manufacture astronomical spectroscopes), and we believe that we should be able to offer a workshop on this topic next season.

Under-18s Update

Work has continued to incorporate this policy change into the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the museum [see next section]. There is a minor issue with the RMG website which is not listing membership pricing correctly. Christina will raise this with the museum.

Members' Talks

Christina reported that the evening went very well. All talks were very interesting and completed on time and the meeting was well attended. We will review next season to see if there is enough interest to run the event again next year, or whether we should take a break of a year.

Society Trips

There are currently 17 bookings for the visit to Jodrell Bank. Bookings will close on 8th June, so we will send a reminder out to members in the next few days. A couple of members have offered to pick up attendees from Macclesfield station, which will reduce the need to book taxis to Jodrell Bank.

Mike reported that he had not yet contacted Herstmonceux to arrange a trip. The committee agreed that we would look at organising a trip in early September, so we would need to work around the dates of the annual astronomy festival which takes place at Herstmonceux at around this time.

BAA Back to Basics Day

Andy reported that he was speaking with the British Astronomical Association (BAA) as regards what would be required to host a “Back to Basics” day at the Flamsteed. This has been raised with the membership department at the museum and they seemed keen to proceed, stating that the lecture theatre could be used on a Saturday.

Members Solar Viewing

Clive stated that we had 12 bookings for the first event, due to take place on Tuesday 28th May, which is about average. A reminder would be sent to members in the next few days.

Flamsteed Birthday

A talk about John Flamsteed for the 2019/20 season, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of his death and the 20th birthday of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society, is to be arranged. It was suggested that we approach Dr Rebekah Higgitt at the University of Kent to potentially give a talk as part of the History of Astronomy programme.

2. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Update

Andy highlighted some of the main changes that have been proposed to the MoU:

- Reflecting the admission of under-18s as members of the society:
 - Allowing members aged 16 or 17 years to attend all Flamsteed events on museum premises;
 - Ensuring that members aged 16 or 17 years are accompanied by a parent or legal guardian for all Flamsteed events off museum premises.
- Changing the legal entity from “National Maritime Museum” to “Royal Museum Greenwich”. This will be clarified with the museum, as it had previously been understood that “Royal Museums Greenwich” is the collective brand name for the Museum's four sites, whereas the museum is established by legislation under the name “National Maritime Museum”.
- Formally increasing the size of the elected committee to 12 people, with the RMG able to send any 2 representatives to a committee meeting.
- Allowing for one or two vice-chairs of the society, depending on the will of the Flamsteed committee alone.
- The committee alone can amend, add or remove committee roles as it sees fit.
- Clarifying that there is no term limit to committee membership.
- Clarifying that an RMG volunteer must be present at all Flamsteed events off museum premises and making all reasonable endeavours to ensure that at least one committee member is present at all events.
- Allowing all committee members to claim for out-of-pocket expenses with the approval of a Flamsteed office holder (chair or vice-chair).

The committee thanked Andy for the work completed on this document. Andy will now complete discussions with the membership department at the museum and ensure that the updated document is signed by Kevin Fewster (Director of the Museum) before Kevin's departure in mid-July this year.

3. Lecture Programme 2019/20 planning update

Helen gave an update on lecture planning for the 2019/20 season. We had approached high-profile lecturers initially, such as Helen Sharman and Jim Al-Khalili, but unsurprisingly had not managed to secure bookings. Two lecturers have confirmed, with two more likely to confirm in the coming days, so good progress has been made.

We don't currently have a speaker for the September lecture, so this is Helen's main priority at present. Mike suggested using our contacts at UCL (e.g. Dr Francisco Diego) or Oxford University (e.g. Professor Chris Lintott) to see if they could suggest any suitable speakers.

Helen is looking to get all lectures up to Christmas 2019 filled first. If there are some lecture dates open in the second half of the season, it might provide some flexibility in approaching lecturers who are based outside of the UK so that any talk can correspond to a time when the speaker is visiting the UK on other business.

4. Outreach / ROG Support Events

a. Aluna and Afyah Sisters Eid event - Glyndon Park - Tuesday 4th June

Mike informed the committee that we had been approached by Laura Williams from the Aluna project (who are planning to build a major Moon and Tide clock on the Meridian). As part of their engagement work, they have partnered with Royal Museums Greenwich and are delivering a public programme called "Greenwich Moon Time".

One of the upcoming community events they are developing is with a Muslim women's support group in Plumstead - the Afyah Sisters - who are attempting to perform a local sighting of the Crescent Moon for Eid. It will be in Glyndon Park and will connect live back to the Royal Observatory Greenwich. The Afyah are expecting a large attendance of all ages and cultures.

Mike will be making a site-visit to Glyndon Park on Friday 24th May to determine sight lines, etc. Once completed, Mike will contact committee members to see who could help at the event on Tuesday 4th June.

It is likely to be very tricky to spot the Crescent Moon on 4th June, due to proximity of the Sun, and the fact that the Moon will be setting in the north-west. There is likely to be significant light extinction from the haze and light pollution over London. Mike has managed the expectations of organisers but believes that the event is still worthwhile supporting.

The committee agreed to support the event.

b. The ROG's Stranger Worlds event - Saturday 15th June

The society has been approached to get involved in this event once again. The plan is to run a Flamsteed 'stand' in the Astronomy Centre, engaging attendees in astronomy and promoting membership of our society.

We would look to do something like what we've done in the past at other ROG events (and this one when it was last run in 2017) where we've had our banner, flyers and a couple of telescopes set up as talking points.

We have 6 confirmed volunteers for the event (Brian, Christina, Clive, Mike, Nick and Tej).

c. Members' Private View evening of "The Moon" exhibition – Friday 19th July

Christina informed the committee that the Flamsteed had been asked to be present at the Members' Private View of "The Moon" exhibition. Our offering would be like the "Stranger Worlds" event, but with more emphasis on the Moon. Andy and Simon agreed to create a video of astrophotography images focused on lunar photography.

The committee agreed to support the event. There are two sessions planned on the day, so we would look to support the evening event.

d. Evening of Astrophotography - October

We don't have a confirmed date for this event yet, but it is likely to take place in October. The Flamsteed have supported this event in the past so it was agreed that we would be happy to support the event later this year, pending further details.

e. Partial Lunar Eclipse - Tuesday 16th July

The ROG are running an event on the evening of the partial lunar eclipse on 16th July. As the eclipse is only visible after the ROG closes at 9pm, attendees would be encouraged to exit Greenwich Park at the end of the event and gather on Blackheath to watch the Moon rise. Mike agreed to organise an observing event on Blackheath to support this.

f. Transit of Mercury - Monday 11th November

The ROG are planning to hold an event to view the Transit of Mercury on 11th November. As the Sun will be very low in the sky at this time of year, the museum is trying to find a suitable location. The roof of Flamsteed House has been mentioned as a possibility, with a live stream of the images shown on screens at ground level. The committee agreed that we would support the event in whatever capacity required.

g. Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival - Sunday 21st July and Mycenae House Summer Sunday Parksfest - Sunday 28th July

Having reviewed our commitments over this period (partial lunar eclipse, "The Moon" exhibition and several public solar viewing events), the committee believed that we had insufficient resources to support these events. It is important that we don't overstretch our volunteers, especially when supporting museum events and membership events is our priority as a society. Therefore, the committee decided to decline our invitations to be involved in the festival events on 21st and 28th July.

5. Any other business

a. Flamsteed Tour of “The Moon” Exhibition

Brendan Owens at the ROG had kindly agreed to arrange for a Flamsteed members tour of “The Moon” exhibition. Dates and details are still being worked on but should be finalised soon.

b. Radio Astronomy Equipment at Flamsteed House

Tom Kerss at the ROG has mentioned that it may be possible to site radio astronomy equipment on the roof of Flamsteed House. We will await developments with interest.

c. Disabled Lift Issues

At our last lecture, the disabled lift by the lecture theatre failed once again. This is the third time at recent lecture events that this has happened. Andy has already raised this with the museum and impressed upon them the need to provide adequate access for our disabled members. The matter has been brought to the attention of RMG operations director Andy Bodle. Asra suggested that a ramp should be provided instead of a lift, as the lift was clearly not being correctly maintained. Andy agreed to discuss this suggestion with the museum.

d. Flamsteed “sail” banner

Andy asked if it was worthwhile purchasing a “sail” banner to advertise the Flamsteed at our outside events, as the current banner is not much use when it is windy. It was agreed that we should investigate this. In addition, it might be worthwhile looking at a solution for our astrophotography images, as lugging the current display boards to events causes logistical problems.

Andy agreed to investigate a solution.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.53pm.