

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held at 7.00pm on Thursday 7th February 2013 in the Member's Room at the National Maritime Museum.

Attendance: Malcolm Porter (Chair), Mike Meynell (Vice-Chair), Brian Blake, Brian Evans, Roger Geeson, Asra Jilani, Peter Kitcherside, Sumitra Sribhashyam, Lesley Hodsdon (RMG Membership Manager), Caroline Hussey-Bain (RMG Membership Coordinator).

Apologies: Jane Bendall, Grey Liple, Deborah McGarvey, Chris Mann, and Lin Potter.

1. **Apologies:** Apologies were received from Jane Bendall, Grey Liple, Deborah McGarvey, Chris Mann and Lin Potter.

Deborah has decided to step down from the Committee from September, but will continue to support the committee and the society until then. The committee passed a vote of thanks to Deborah for all her support over the years.

2. **Matters Arising:** Malcolm stated that we are close to having a back up lecture / presentation lined up in case a speaker fails to attend a lecture at Flamsteed.

He also said that Flamsteed should start thinking of a package of 'Stargazing Live in a Box' for any future Stargazing Live events that the Flamsteed may be involved with, given that we often find ourselves involved in these events at very short notice. This is something that we hope to build over the next few months so we are ready for any event next year.

Mike mentioned that the 'Sky this Month' slot was going well every month before each lecture and that this will continue.

3. **Update to the Memorandum of Understanding:** The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is the document that defines the relationship between the society and the museum. Malcolm and Mike have been working with the museum over the last few months to update the MoU so that it reflects the changes resulting from our membership strategy review of last year.

The main changes to the MoU are as follows:

- We refer to the entitlement for members to book attendance at lectures, rather than a broad 'right to attend'. In addition, there is reference to televising to an overflow area in the event of over capacity.
- The responsibility to 'check-in' members and guests at lectures is assigned to the museum, as is the provision of catering supplies at lectures.

- At the AGM, we will ask members to elect not just the committee members, but also ‘office holders’ of the society (i.e. chair and vice-chair positions).
- A ‘code of conduct’ for members of the society has been added.
- Guidelines for dealing with the media have been added.

The rest of the changes are mostly clarifying existing clauses, providing more flexibility in the definition of certain clauses or dealing with previous typographic errors.

Brian Blake asked about how any breach of the code of conduct would be dealt with. Mike answered that we would follow the standard museum disciplinary process and that there would be a right to appeal any decision.

Brian Evans was concerned about the potential for embarrassment at the AGM should there be a contested election of committee members or office holders. It was agreed that this was something we had to accept in order for the society to be more democratic. Officers would be elected first, followed by committee members.

Malcolm mentioned that we might need to change the way that the budgets and finances are handled within the society. This could mean appointing a committee member to be responsible for tracking this information in conjunction with the museum. This is not in the MoU at present, but is something we need to work on in the future.

Committee members agreed that the MoU accurately reflected the relationship with the museum and were happy for Malcolm to sign the document on behalf of the society.

Malcolm reiterated that this was a working document and would always require adjustment as the society and museum evolve.

4. **Arrangements for trip to CERN:** The original date we were given by CERN for our proposed trip was within the summer school holiday period, so would have been costly for our members to attend. Mike has requested a new date for the trip and this has now been confirmed as Saturday 21st September at 2pm.

Mike stated that this would be a trip to the visitor centre only. However, there are some members of the society who are in touch with people with a close connection to CERN, which may mean that we are able to organise something slightly more than the standard visitor trip. This is something we will work on in the next few months.

Mike stated that if we take more than 24 people on the trip, we would have to provide our own coach to travel to CERN. From 24 people or less, CERN provide transportation. Given that there had been interest from around 60-70 Flamsteed

members, the question was asked whether 24 people would be enough. It was decided that we would proceed with 24 people and look at arranging a second trip if the demand was high enough and the first trip was successful. Any more than 24 people would create a large admin overhead.

The logistical problems involved with booking flights and accommodation for 24 people was discussed. Given that the society has no bank account facilities, we would be entirely reliant on the museum to administer this. Also, some members said that they were happy to meet the group at CERN, which adds to the complication. The issues of risk and liability to the museum and society were also discussed.

It was agreed that, instead of organising the trip on behalf of members, the society would provide a list of preferred flights and accommodation options. Members could then book these options on their own terms. Attendees would meet at an agreed rendezvous point at a specific time to gain entrance to CERN.

Mike agreed to investigate the flights and accommodation options and communicate this to the society. If more than 24 people applied for the trip, a ballot would be organised.

5. **Update on Membership numbers:** Membership numbers have gone up by nearly 30% since February 2012, by 60% over 2 years and have doubled in the last 3 years. However, Mike stated that we still haven't breached the capacity of the lecture theatre (~130) with an average of around 85-90 members attending per lecture.

In order to try and understand why this would be, Mike has done an analysis of how far away our members live from Greenwich in comparison to the same period last year. There has been a definite increase in the number of members who live more than 10 miles from Greenwich in the past year.

Interestingly, if we take the number of members who live within 10 miles of Greenwich and assume that these people are more likely to turn up to lectures, a similar proportion of members are attending lectures in comparison to last year (about 35% of members who live within 10 miles are attending). This does suggest that we may be able to absorb further growth in society numbers without the lecture theatre capacity being breached on a regular basis.

Caroline asked for clarification of whether members can bring guests and children. Mike explained that no one under the age of 18 years is permitted to attend a Flamsteed lecture. Guests can attend a lecture, if they want to try out the society prior to joining, providing they have the prior agreement of a Flamsteed office holder. For some very popular events, we would not allow guests.

6. **Annual Calendar for Flamsteed:** Malcolm stated that he would like to develop an annual calendar of dates for the Flamsteed detailing when certain events need to take place (e.g. budget submission, lecture dates, committee meetings, etc). It was agreed that Mike would develop this calendar and circulate to the committee in due course.

Brian Evans said that it is not always possible to book the lecture theatre for Mondays as the museum is becoming busier. Mike said that setting the dates in advance didn't mean that we couldn't move them at a later date. The calendar should be used as a planning tool.

Asra said that a few members asked if this year's Christmas lecture could be in the Planetarium again as there was some disappointment that it wasn't in the Planetarium last year. Brian Evans said that we tried something different last year as the feedback from members had been that the Planetarium show at Christmas didn't seem to differ much from previous years. Mike said that he would try and arrange a Planetarium show specifically for Flamsteed members at some point in the near future, as this hasn't been done for quite a while.

7. **Members only area on Website:** Mike suggested that a 'members-only' area be set up on the Flamsteed website. This was so that content that should be available only to members could be placed on the website (e.g. newsletters from the Federation of Astronomical Societies).

This would also give an option to record lectures in the future and add the content to the website for access only by members. Clearly this would need the agreement of lecturers.

The committee agreed that this was a good idea and Mike agreed to take this forward. Members would request access to the 'members-only' area on the website and their details would be manually checked against the membership database prior to allowing them access. Malcolm asked if we could create an online forum to allow for discussions amongst members. Mike said that he would look into this.

8. **AOB:** Brian Evans raised a point about those members who do not have access to email. It was agreed that communications would not be sent prior to every lecture, but instead would be restricted to one or two communications per year with details of the agreed lecture dates. Members would be asked to contact the membership department to book their seats and confirm that the lecture would go ahead as originally planned.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.