

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 29th May 2014 in Mycenae House at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Malcolm Porter (Chairman), Mike Meynell (Vice Chairman), Brian Blake, Christina Chester, Roger Geeson, Nick Phillips and Rupert Smith.

Apologies: Grey Liple (Vice Chairman), Asra Jilani, Lin Potter and Sumitra Sribhashyam.

1. Matters Arising:

Problems with Membership Renewals and the Booking System: Concerns were raised about continued problems with the new membership system, particularly with members being dropped from the membership list when they may wish to renew. Malcolm is trying to organise a meeting with Chris Hill and his Director, Simon Daniels, at the museum to discuss further.

Flickr and Digital Strategy: Brian raised an issue with members not understanding how to post pictures on Flickr to share with the Flamsteed. Mike stated that the use of images on the website would be part of the Digital Strategy review. Unfortunately, there had been no time to commence this review, but he hoped to make progress during the close season.

Social Evenings: In response to membership feedback, the committee had agreed to change the social evening venue to the Trafalgar Tavern in Greenwich. Our social events in February and March took place at the Trafalgar, but this had no discernable impact on attendance numbers, and regular attendees requested a return to our previous venue of the British Oak. This was done for the April and May events, which were both successful evenings. The British Oak will be retained as the venue moving forward.

Programme Administrator Role: Mike reminded committee members that the role of Programme Administrator would need to be filled prior to the start of the 2014/15 season. A committee meeting would be held prior to the AGM on 15 September.

2. Purchases from the Reserve Fund:

Several meetings and conversations with the museum have taken place on potential purchases for the Royal Observatory from the Flamsteed reserve fund. At the last committee meeting in February, the committee agreed to several items. The committee expressed a preference for purchasing items that were to be used for educational purposes and items that would also be beneficial for Flamsteed members when attending museum events.

With this guidance, subsequent to the last committee meeting, Malcolm and Mike have had face-to-face meetings with Rob Edwards, Tom Kerss and Nick Babbs at the Royal Observatory to clarify certain items and finalise the list of purchases.

The list of items has now been agreed. The museum initially asked a single supplier to give a quote for the items, which has now been provided. Malcolm subsequently did a web search of potential alternative suppliers, with the result that there appeared to be no discernable difference in overall costs in comparison to the supplier chosen by the museum. We have therefore advised the museum of this fact, with the hope that they can use this information to reduce the overall costs of the items further.

Rupert had also provided a quotation for the agreed items, with the total cost around 10% lower than the quote from the museum supplier. This information could be used by the museum in any price negotiations, but, ultimately, the supplier or suppliers used in purchasing the agreed items is up to the museum, as is the negotiation of the final cost, presumably from the preferred supplier list. We are awaiting final confirmation from the museum that the items are in line with expectations and what the next steps should be.

3. Setting up an Online Discussion Forum:

The possibility of setting up an online forum to allow for discussions amongst members was first raised at committee in February 2013. Mike had created a mock-up design for the forum, but the idea was not taken forward as it wasn't clear that there was sufficient support from members of the society nor an adequate number of people to moderate the site.

In recent months and weeks, several Flamsteed members have asked about the possible creation of an online discussion forum for the Flamsteed. Critically, some members have agreed to help out in moderating the forum.

Separate sub-forums for the special interest groups and for discussions on lectures and other Flamsteed events would be created.

The committee agreed to go ahead with the creation of a forum. Mike would come up with the best technical solution for integrating the forum into the main Flamsteed website, and would liaise with those who expressed an interest in the forum to get them involved in the set up and moderation routines.

4. Solar Viewing:

4a. Public Viewing Events at the ROG

Nick has put together some dates and times for solar viewing sessions at the ROG during the months of July and August. There are 8 dates in total, 4 on a Saturday and 4 on a

Wednesday. It is unlikely that we will be able to run all of these events, due to the weather, but Nick hopes to run at least 4-6 events over the summer period.

These dates have been sent to the museum for approval, and we expect to hear back soon. Once approval has been given, we will publicise the events via the website and arrange for volunteers to help out.

Mike stated that the old “*Coronado Corps*” mailing list of potential volunteers is very out of date and needs attention. Mike agreed to recreate this list and also send a request out to members to see if any new members would be interested in being involved. Realistically, we can run midweek events with 2-3 volunteers and weekend events with 3-4 volunteers, but ideally we would like 5 volunteers on a Saturday so that people can take a break during the day.

4b. Proposal for Members Solar Viewing Events at the ROG:

Nick submitted a proposal for a series of members-only solar viewing events within the grounds of the ROG. The proposed idea is to run 2-4 events over the summer months, with 20-30 members per event, based on a first-come, first-served booking process. The events would be run in the early evening, after the museum is closed, from around 5:30pm/6:00pm until around 8:00pm. This would be on the proviso that we obtain museum permission and resources to manage the event and that we can find a position within the ROG grounds to be able to see the Sun at these times. It was suggested that the Meridian Courtyard would probably provide the best views during the summer months.

The aim of these events is to promote interest in safe solar viewing to members and their guests, to raise the profile of Solar Observing, to make more use of the equipment available to us and to work with the Observing and Imaging Group to use the Coronado for solar imaging.

The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea and thanked Nick for his proposal. It was agreed that Flamsteed funds could be used to cover the museum staffing costs. The next steps are:

- Contact the museum (initially Nick Babbs) to get permission to run the events;
- Determine the cost of staffing the events;
- Organise a number of proposed dates with the museum.

4c. Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival

Rupert updated the committee on plans for Flamsteed involvement in the Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival on Saturday 19 July.

We are grateful to a Flamsteed member, Clive Inglis, for putting us in touch with the Friends of Shrewsbury Park (FSP) committee. The FSP committee would be pleased to have our participation in a solar viewing activity between 1pm and 4pm. They are hoping

to judge local interest in astronomy with a view to sanctioning some future night-time events in Shrewsbury Park. From a Flamsteed perspective, it will be useful publicity for the society.

The committee agreed that our participation in the Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival was an excellent idea and thanked Rupert for coordinating the Flamsteed presence at the event.

Malcolm offered the use of a gazebo at the event. The committee agreed that this would be a useful solution. If our participation at these types of events were to become more frequent, the society would look at purchasing a gazebo for use at these events.

5. Honorary Membership Guidelines:

Malcolm suggested that it was time for the committee to set guidelines on how honorary membership was granted.

A suggestion was made that we may wish to consider granting honorary membership to those who have contributed to astronomy in general, rather than just to the Flamsteed.

The general consensus was that we should grant honorary membership to those who have made an exceptional contribution to the society over a period of several years. Malcolm agreed to come up with a set of guidelines for presentation at a future committee meeting.

6. Update on ROG Activities:

Malcolm gave the committee an update on various initiatives currently in discussion at the Royal Observatory. Initially, there has been a rebranding of certain areas of the ROG: the 28-inch refractor has been renamed as the Great Equatorial Telescope and the Meridian Building has been renamed as the Meridian Observatory.

There is a wide-ranging review of the state of the ROG currently taking place, covering short, medium and long-term plans for the observatory.

7. CERN and Herstmonceux Trips:

The Flamsteed trips to CERN in Geneva and the Observatory Science Centre in Herstmonceux will take place during the month of June. A total of 24 people are booked on to the trip to CERN and (at present) 27 are booked for the trip to Herstmonceux.

Herstmonceux will be a full day event; from 10am to 6pm. Tours of the telescope domes, including those not normally open to the public, have been arranged. In addition, we have

arranged a tour of the Space Geodesy Facility and have also agreed to meet with the radio astronomy group.

8. Any Other Business:

Flamsteed Star Camp

Rupert gave us an update on plans for a Flamsteed star party at a small campsite in Romney Marsh in October this year. The optimum date for the camp would be the weekend of 18-19 October. A trial session had taken place in September last year, which was very successful.

Rupert has contacted the campsite and will update the committee when we receive some firm plans and costs for the event. When this has been received, we will contact Flamsteed members to determine interested in the event.

Royal Astronomical Society Anniversary

The RAS are developing a series of initiatives running up to their bicentennial in 2020. To celebrate their bicentennial, they are establishing an Outreach and Engagement Fund of £1,000,000, to support projects that increase the understanding, discussion and dialogue about science in diverse sections of the community.

Brian asked if this was something that the Flamsteed should get involved in. Malcolm proposed that Brian find out more regarding this initiative and potentially come up with a proposal that would also involve the museum. The committee agreed and thanked Brian for bringing the initiative to our attention.

Vanbrugh Community Association at Mycenae House

We have been looking for a more permanent venue for committee meetings and a potential venue to hold workshops outside of museum grounds, for some time. The committee agreed that Mycenae House had proved to be an excellent venue for the committee meeting and provided some useful possibilities for a future programme of workshops on observing and imaging, which Rupert has previously proposed. Mycenae House also has disabled access on the ground floor.

It was agreed that Mike would apply, on behalf of the Flamsteed, for Affiliated Membership of the Vanbrugh Community Association, so that we can take advantage of much reduced room rates. This would make the workshops very cost effective and would provide more flexibility outside of the museum environment to offer a series of connected workshops to Flamsteed members.

Links to Local Societies

Rupert raised the possibility of forging links with other local societies, perhaps with members offering to give talks to these societies about the activities of the Flamsteed or on topics of scientific interest. We could also invite members of these societies along to Flamsteed events. The committee agreed that this was a good idea. Mike mentioned that we had previously forged links with Aperture (the Woolwich Photographic Society), with involvement in our astrophotography workshop. Mike agreed to get a list of local societies and raise this at a future committee meeting.

New Exhibition Opening

The opening of the new exhibition in the Sammy Ofer Wing “*Ships, Clocks and Stars: The Quest for Longitude*” will be on Thursday 10 July. Mike has contacted the museum to see if they would like any Flamsteed involvement in the opening of the exhibition, along the same lines as our solar viewing session at the “*Visions of the Universe*” opening last year. Mike will update the committee if there is any requirement for our involvement in an event.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed at 9pm.