

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 11th September 2018 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Christina Chester (vice-chair), Grey Liple (vice-chair), Barry Cassels, Clive Inglis, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Roger Geeson, Rupert Smith, Simon Hurst.

Apologies: Asra Jilani, Bobby Manoo, Brian Blake, Helen Edwards, Tej Dyal.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on Thursday 28th June

North Essex Astronomy Society

The North Essex Astronomy Society (NEAS) visited the Royal Observatory on Saturday 21st July, with 30 attendees. Christina, Nick, Mike Dryland, Stan Payne and Stephen Brooks assisted on the day. A tour of the ROG took place, along with an impromptu solar viewing event. The visit went very well, and we have received some very pleasant feedback and thanks from the NEAS.

Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival

Andy reported that the event went ahead, and our presence was well received by visitors. The committee thanked Andy and Clive for their involvement on the day, particularly as the weather conditions were extremely hot.

Charlton & Woolwich Free Film Festival

Andy and Mike will be assisting at this event on Friday 14 September. Mike will be bringing observing equipment and Andy will be bringing the astrophotography display.

New Scientist Live

The Flamsteed will be in attendance, sharing the stand with the British Astronomical Association (BAA), on Sunday 23 September. Clive, Mike and Nick will be volunteering to help on the day. Mike will be bringing equipment for demonstration purposes. Andy will update the quiz video and astrophotography video. Christina agreed to put together a "Sky this Month" video presentation and liaise with Janice at the BAA to ensure that the presentation is combined with the BAA presentation. Mike will put together a "buying your first telescope" presentation.

We have received 4 complimentary one-day passes to attend the event on any of the days. We will determine how to distribute these over the next few days.

Car Sharing Arrangements

No progress has been made on this, but Christina will follow this up before the first events that require car sharing.

Membership Survey

Andy and Christina will be meeting with the membership team at the museum in the next few days. Andy hopes to finalise the survey in advance of this meeting and gain agreement with the museum to distribute it to members. Mike reminded the committee that the membership department sent the survey to an external agency, for validation, when we last performed this exercise, so we should be prepared for this to happen again.

Andy suggested that we use the signed Astronomy Photographer of the Year book as a raffle prize to those who respond to the survey. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea.

2. Under-18s update

Andy, Christina and Mike attended a meeting with Lance Bourne at the ROG on 14 August to finalise the arrangements for allowing under 18s to join the society. Lance confirmed that the Museum's insurance will cover the Flamsteed for all our events, including when we admit 16 and 17-year olds to the Society. The proviso is that the under-18s will be required to have a parent or guardian with them when attending any of our offsite events or visits. In addition, the parent or guardian must remain in attendance, not simply drop off and come back later.

Events on museum premises can be attended without supervision.

This means that we will not need to devise a specific child safeguarding policy for offsite events. Of course, the existing requirement remains in place that at least one RMG volunteer from the Flamsteed committee be present at all events.

We will discuss with Chloe and the membership team on how best to ensure that we can identify under-18s.

Mike mentioned that there is a current check of attendees for those who book on our events through Eventbrite, to ensure that they are members of the society. This check could be extended to ensure that any member under the age of 18 also had a booking for their parent or guardian.

A process will be agreed after we understand how the membership team will be dealing with under-18 members. In addition, the Flamsteed Memorandum of Understanding with the museum will need some amendments.

3. Update on the Annie Maunder Astrographic Telescope (AMAT)

Christina reported that a meeting took place on 14 August with Brendan Owens at the ROG. Flamsteed attendees included all those involved in organising and running practical astronomy events.

The museum has formulated a high-level plan for the usage of AMAT over the next few years. This includes post-graduate programmes, publications, annual exhibitions that would complement the Insight Astronomy Photographer of the Year exhibition, and potential collaborations with other UK facilities.

The ROG wish to recruit a small pool of Astrographic Volunteers to work alongside a part-time employed Astrographic Officer. Recruitment of the Astrographic Officer is likely to take place in October.

Applications for the Volunteer roles will be encouraged from those with existing image capture and processing skills, with the aim to then (initially) recruit around five volunteers to get things up and running. The future might see this pool expanding with this core pool of volunteers training others and increasing the number of volunteers who would be on-hand to help – in turn, this would enable more activities to take place.

“Back of House” sessions have been piloted, where volunteers deliver short talks on the AMAT as part of a short-tour. A maximum of 12 people are allowed in the telescope dome at any point in time.

At present, it is understood that processing of images from AMAT must take place on-site at the ROG due to copyright concerns. The museum will consider the usage of a non-disclosure agreement to enable volunteers to process images off-site, allowing them to use their own image processing workflows at a time and venue of their choosing, thus increasing flexibility and hopefully encouraging more volunteers to get involved.

4. Review of the 2017/18 season

Over the course of the 2017/18 season, the Flamsteed organised 85 events (one more than last season), with 21 cancellations of observing events, leaving 64 events run in total (again, one more than last season).

Event type	Number arranged	Cancellations	Number run
Lectures	10	0	10
Members' Talks	1	0	1
Great Equatorial Telescope viewings / planetarium back-up	6	0	6
Blackheath viewings	10	7	3
Romney viewings	6	4	2
Public solar viewings at the ROG	15	9	6
Members solar viewings at the ROG	4	1	3
Practical Astronomy workshops	6	0	6
History of Astronomy group talks	5	0	5
Solar viewing training sessions	2	0	2
Trips - ROG curator tour / Bayfordbury Observatory / Mullard	3	0	3
Social evenings	11	0	11
Outreach events - Film Festival, SpaceUp, New Scientist, Shrewsbury Park	4	0	4
ROG support events - Evening of Astrophotography, AMAT opening	2	0	2
TOTAL	85	21	64

Andy thanked all committee members involved in organising and running these events. We remain an incredibly busy society, and committee members continue to step up and take responsibility for ensuring that the events are successful, which we know is much appreciated by the membership and by the museum.

Romney

2 out of 6 scheduled events went ahead, slightly better than last season. We always err on the side of caution with weather forecasts for these events, but the events which were held went very well.

Blackheath

Only 3 out of 10 scheduled events were possible due to the weather. Whenever they are run, however, they remain popular and well received by members of the society and by members of the public who attend.

Solar Viewing Sessions

Tej reported via email that 5 out of 14 events were successfully run during the summer period (plus one from September 2017 to be included in the season totals). Events were scheduled on Thursdays and Saturdays. It is estimated that we had around 1,500 visitors over the 5 summer events. 10 new solar volunteers put their names forward, with 4 taking part in events. 25 volunteers were scheduled in total over the period.

Clive reported that 3 out of 4 members' solar viewing sessions went ahead, with 55 members attending. Most of the attendees were new members and were very enthusiastic.

Expenses

Christina reported on the expenditure of the society over the past year, excluding museum costs (such as staffing for our lecture evenings, etc). This includes costs for lecturer fees, catering & hospitality, meeting room hire (Mycenae House), website & SMS costs, and BAA/FAS membership fees.

The total expenditure for these items for the season is around £1,300, which is significantly under budget. However, we do not have budget figures for the season, only for the financial year. Andy and Christina will raise this with the membership department.

5. Planned activities for 2018/19

Lectures

Dates for all 10 lecture evenings have been scheduled, with lecturers organised for 7 of the evenings. The remaining 3 evenings (January, February and May 2019) should be filled soon. The committee thanked Helen for all her efforts in contacting lecturers for the coming season.

Andy suggested that we try to determine which of our speakers have recently had books published, so that the museum could be given more notice to have the book on sale for our lecture evening.

The first lecture of the season (on 17 September) is already fully booked. Mike suggested contacting the museum so that they could check the attendee list for any multiple bookings (which has happened in the past). We will need to use the ticketing system for any walk-ups on the evening, so that we ensure that the lecture theatre is not over capacity.

Members' Talks

It was decided to schedule a date for another Members' Talks evening, following the success of last season, probably in May 2019. Christina would try to determine if we had enough speakers for the evening before formally publicising the event.

Talks by Non-Members

Christina informed the committee that we had received an approach from a volunteer at the museum, who is not a member of the society, who would like to give a talk on the Transit of Venus. This talk may fit into the Members' Talks evening, or potentially a History of Astronomy talk. We will ask for further details and factor into the planning for these events.

Great Equatorial Telescope

Seven events have been offered for the 2018/19 season, and all have the planetarium available for weather back-up purposes. The possibility of using the Alt-Azimuth pavilion for some weather back-up activities will be raised by Tej over the course of the season.

History of Astronomy Group

Bobby reported via email prior to the meeting that Nick Babbs has sent through a list of dates when the Planetarium foyer is available. He will now commence with building the schedule for the season.

Practical Astronomy Group

Mike reported that we were likely to run the same list of workshops as last season. He will contact Mycenae House to get a list of available dates and schedule in the workshops with facilitators.

Public Solar Viewing

These events are expected to commence again in May 2019.

Members Solar Viewing

Clive suggested that we might try to commence members events earlier in the year for this season, perhaps also commencing in May. This may also enable us to start the sessions at an earlier time, perhaps at 6pm, as the observatory will not have late opening during this period.

Romney Observing

All Romney observing dates for 2018/19 have been scheduled, six in total, with weather back-up nights for each event. The committee thanked Martin and Jane for their hospitality and work involved in organising these events once again.

Blackheath Observing

Rupert has scheduled eight Blackheath events over the course of the season, with weather back-up nights for each event. The committee thanked Rupert for organising these events and hoped for better luck with the weather this season.

Social Evenings

These have been scheduled up until Christmas. Following member feedback, the start time has been brought forward to 7.30pm in the hope of attracting a few more attendees.

Trip to RAS Library

This trip has been scheduled for 27 September and was fully booked very quickly. The waiting list is now open.

Trip to E-Eye in Spain

The response from the membership has been disappointing for this trip, with only 2 confirmed attendees. We need 5 attendees for the trip to go ahead. Committee members were asked if they

wanted to attend, and it was also agreed to offer the trip to Crayford Manor House Astronomy Society members via Janice to see if we could fill the remaining places. Christina agreed to email Janice.

Graveyard Tour

This was raised at the last committee meeting. Jane Bendall organised a previous trip, and Graham Dolan was also mentioned as someone who could potentially organise such a tour.

Trip to La Palma

A potential trip to La Palma in September 2019 would need to be organised during this season if it is going to go ahead. We could mention the possibility of this trip at the AGM next week to determine how many people may be interested in attending.

Cinema Trip

Andy mentioned that the movie "First Man", about Neil Armstrong, will be released in October. He suggested a potential organised trip to the cinema for Flamsteed members. The committee agreed that this was a good idea. Mike suggested contacting the Picturehouse in Greenwich to see if we could get a discounted group rate for tickets. Andy agreed to follow this up.

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. Christina suggested using Revolut pre-paid cards, and Andy agreed to investigate this.

6. Committee roles / AGM

No committee members will be stepping down, and no nominations to serve on the committee have been received. There is therefore no change to committee membership for the 2018/19 season.

Andy indicated that he would be happy to continue to serve as chair for the coming season.

Christina indicated that she would be happy to serve as vice-chair for a further season. She also indicated that the committee should be looking at a succession plan for next season, as she may only be willing to serve for a further year.

Grey announced that he had decided to step down from his vice-chair role at the AGM. He has not been able to dedicate as much time to the role as he would have liked, due to work and home commitments. The committee thanked Grey for his fantastic service in the role over the last few years.

It was put to the committee that it was no longer necessary to have two vice-chair roles. The move to two vice-chairs was necessary a few years ago, due to circumstances in how the society was being run. These circumstances no longer exist. The committee agreed that this was the correct way forward, so the society will revert to having one vice-chair for 2018/19 season.

There was no necessity to amend the Memorandum of Understanding, as the two vice-chair roles are only listed in the appendix to the MoU.

Malcolm agreed to help at the AGM as the interregnum chair for re-election of the chair and vice-chair positions.

7. Any other business

Christie Enclosure

Malcolm displayed some 3-dimensional images of buildings from the old Christie Enclosure in Greenwich Park, which had been put together by a friend of his. The committee agreed that images were very interesting and very well presented. Malcolm mentioned that he has been in touch with Brendan Owens at the museum with the possibility of the museum using the images in the future.

Astronomy Photographer of the Year Book

Andy asked if it was worthwhile purchasing the Astronomy Photographer of the Year book this year, for signing by our lecturers, given that the book isn't published until early November and will therefore miss our first 2 lectures.

The committee felt that it was worthwhile, as we could have lecturers sign it over a calendar year and offer it as a raffle prize at the Christmas 2019 lecture.

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