

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held at 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday 1st February 2012 in the Young Education Services Office, SE10.

- 1. Present:** Lin Potter (Chair), Jane Bendall, Mike Dryland, Rob Edwards, Brian Evans, Peter Kitcherside, Grey Liple, Mike Meynell, Malcolm Porter, Sumitra Sribhashyam and David Waugh
- 2. Apologies** were received Roger Geeson, Rachel Harrison and Deborah McGarvey
- 3. Matters arising:** there were no matters arising from the meeting held on 1st November 2011.

4. Committee composition and roles

Lin welcomed Malcolm Porter, who has been co-opted to the committee and thanked him for volunteering his services.

Jane and others paid tribute to Mike Dryland for his contribution to the Society in his capacity as Vice Chairman, having transformed FAS from a small club to a much more widely known and larger society. A vote of thanks to Mike was proposed and passed unanimously. Mike Meynell was unanimously elected to the position of Vice Chairman of the society.

Mike Meynell has also taken over Mike Dryland's former responsibilities with regard to the website and as assistant membership officer.

Brian is acting as Programme Secretary understudying Jane and David is acting similarly as Committee Secretary.

5. Memorandum of Understanding

Mike Dryland reported that the Memorandum had been signed earlier in the month by the Director. A minor amendment had subsequently been found necessary, as the agreed formula for the AGM quorum had been inadvertently misquoted. The committee approved the amendment and it will be forwarded by Lin for signature.

Lin expressed the thanks of the committee for everyone involved in the development of this important document.

6. Proposed purchases from the Reserve Fund

Grey referred to the list of equipment previously circulated. Brian, Jane and Grey had met with Rob to discuss the items requested by the Observatory, especially binoculars.

A storm case would be purchased for safe mobile storage of the binoculars, which might otherwise be lost or damaged.

Items deemed to be for educational use would be VAT free. It is likely that something like half of the VAT bill could be claimed back in this way, representing considerable savings.

Grey went on to describe the Solar Outreach Kit. The equipment would be packed into a single case for mobility. Rob said that the equipment would be well used, especially for school visits. Grey is said that the basic radio telescope might enable exploration of radio objects apart from the Sun.

The committee then discussed priorities and the need to phase purchase. Jane would initially approach Rosemary Gilbert for purchase action by the Museum. In practice the items could not all be purchased at once. Items might be subject to delay whilst the VAT status of the purchase was established. The laptop would have to be approved by the Museums IT Department and could be subject to restrictions.

It was agreed by the committee that the last three items (digital camera, extension tube and Dell laptop) were of the least priority at present, since members owned comparable equipment which could be used for trials.

The committee expressed its thanks to the equipment subgroup for its work.

A separate proposal by Deborah for the purchase of £200 worth of catering equipment was approved, with expenditure from the society's annual budget, rather than the reserve fund.

7. Membership numbers and society capacity

Mike Dryland and Lin reported that Rosemary Gilbert was not in favour of placing a cap on FAS membership and that Museum policy was for continued expansion. This might necessitate booking for some events, if our membership continued to grow. There are currently 260 members of the FAS but none of the meetings had been oversubscribed, although the recent lecture by Stuart Clark had placed our arrangements under strain.

It was noted that it was still not absolutely clear whose responsibility it was to control admissions to lecture meetings. Our view remained that the Museum staff should undertake the doorkeeper role, as they did for Evening with the Stars events. It was also noted that the control point could be moved closer to the lecture hall entrance than at present.

Rob reminded the meeting that there were Health and Safety, Fire and First Aid requirements for all events at the Museum, in addition to security.

Looking to the future, it was agreed by the committee that not every lecture would require prior booking but the most popular events should be handled in a similar way to the "Star Lectures" of some years ago. The Lintott/Clark lecture in May was a likely

candidate for this approach. We would approach Rachel at an early date regarding lecture security and admissions.

8. Creation of a Radio Astronomy group

It was agreed that the existing small circle of radio astronomy enthusiasts should be opened up to all members. This would be a personal interest group (rather than for volunteering) and would not have any financial implications.

9. Wash –up: Woolwich and Charlton House "Stargazing Live" events

Grey reported that the BBC was thrilled with our input to the recent events, to which we had made the largest volunteer contribution. Visitors had been keen to learn from our presenters, with Brian Blake's astrophotography seminars at Charlton House proving immensely popular. There had been some minor issues with the BBC and Grey had already written regarding these.

10. The use of Eventbrite booking system

Sumitra reported that she had investigated the use of the Eventbrite online booking system. This would enable members to reserve seats for events such as the 28–inch viewing and Romney. The system was able to track numbers, enable cancellations and provided organisers with lists of attendees etc and was completely free for events at which no charge was made.

Mike Meynell said that the system could streamline the administration of the society's events. Eventbrite normally required a list of subscribers e-mails; invitations to events would then be sent out. As this may involve holding "private information (e-mail addresses)" on an externally hosted website, it is possible that some data protection issues would arise with the Museum. However, we had been able to overcome these issues with the SMS text messaging system, so the committee agreed that Sumitra and Mike should investigate further.

11. Planning for events in 2012 – Olympics etc

Rob reported that from 7 July there would be no parking at the Observatory or anywhere in Greenwich Park; access would be through the Queen Mary gate. From 23 July to 3 August the Observatory would be shut.

Grey suggested that solar viewing might be continued to another location, perhaps Charlton House or (conceivably) the Queen's House. The issue would have to be discussed with the museum, as it would mean moving and storing the telescope in a new location, probably away from museum premises.

12. Hare and Billet meetings

Brian reported that the last pub meeting had been very well attended. This was creating problems because the pub management had had to move our group of 14 people four times during the evening in order to make space. We should consider using another venue. The Hare and Billet management had kindly offered to reserve an area for us but this was not really practicable, as the numbers attending could not be predicted. The Ashburnham Arms back room seemed to be the best alternative; he would investigate further.

13. Any other business

Mike Dryland mentioned that no telescope workshops were being planned. Instead of having a lecturer, a telescope "forum" without a talk could be arranged. In the future we could also have astrophotography events, since these appear to be very popular. This was noted by the committee.