

Flamsteed Astronomy Society (FAS) Committee Meeting
21st August 2026, 7pm
245 Court Road, Mottingham. SE9 4TQ.

Present

Bobby Manoo – Chair
Amy Scammell – Secretary
Frederick Botha
Barry Cassels
Clive Inglis
Yvonne Jacobs
Asra Jilani
Alec Knox
Gurinder Lall
Paul May
Paul Merriman
Mike Meynell
Tony Milon
Poly Philippou

Apologies

Simon Hurst – Vice-Chair
Roger Geeson
Richard Summerfield

Minutes

1	Welcome, introductions and apologies
	Bobby welcomed all to the meeting and apologies were noted. The notes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
2	FAS Administration
	a. FAS Committee • Bobby welcomed new committee members Tony, Frederik and Paul Me. Tony and Paul Me will join the main lecture team and will work with Paul M to oversee main lectures. Frederik will support the observing events and will also work with Mike, providing some support around IT. Roger Geeson has stepped down; Mark and Phil have also stepped down; Barry is stepping down, as are Gurinder and Asra. Bobby thanked all outgoing committee members them for all their hard work over the years and noted that the possibility of rejoining remains open. Paul Me, Tony and Frederik will be elected at the AGM. • It was noted that the committee is losing two women and ideally we would address the gender imbalance. Sara Clark has been asked to join but is too busy present; some other women may be interested but are not ready yet. • At the AGM, Bobby will step down and Paul M will become Chair. Bobby thanked everyone for their support over the last five years and said he had really appreciated the opportunity to serve as Chair. He will stay on the committee and will help with the main lecture group. The committee thanked Bobby for being a fantastic Chair and for commitment and leadership. b. FAS Membership • Bobby updated the committee on the latest figures. Membership has declined over the last 12 months, from 554 last August to 496 now. This was expected due to RMG closures, fee increases and cost of living pressures. RMG has had

	a much bigger drop-off rate than FAS. The solar eclipse event appears to have positively impacted membership, as 15 new people have joined and this will show in next month's figures. The committee could encourage RMG to think about how to increase FAS membership, as these are automatically RMG members. RMG is trying to encourage some astronomy elements, for example astronomer takeovers, but these are additional paid-for events. c. FAS MoU - This remains incomplete. No feedback or issues have been received and it remains with the RMG compliance and legal team. Bobby has chased this again and ideally wants it signed before the AGM. Bobby will follow up with RMG. d. Finances - Bobby outlined that FAS is contributing a surplus to RMG. The budget is outlined for the coming season and no additional items were identified. The issue of the float in the bank account remains unresolved. This is being looked into by RMG and in the interim, committee members are asked to optionally make a contribution to the FAS account. Poly noted that there is some excess in the account from social events and La Palma, which could be used to refund Bobby. Bobby noted that the RMG relationship is now really positive and all agreed that they want to maintain this. Paul M, as incoming Chair, will ensure that RMG recognise the FAS contribution. e. AGM - This is taking place before the first lecture of the 2026/27 season. Bobby has put together the video statement. Bobby will moderate the elections as he is not standing for election – the process was confirmed as being correct. All committee members are re-elected automatically. New members will stand up and be elected. The Vice Chair and Chair are elected.
3	Observing Team
	a. Blackheath observing - Mike updated that overall for the 2025/26 season we held 10/12 events with just over 1,000 visitors. There were on average 11 volunteers per session and overall everything worked well. Mike will share dates for the 2026/27 season shortly and these will run on the usual pattern of 2 in September, 2 in October and then 1 per month November through to April with the possibility of 2 events in April. All dates will have back up dates. Mike will aim to tie into any special events or interesting alignments. So far the mixture of smart and traditional telescopes have worked well and will continue. b. Solar observing - Mike updated that 10 of 12 events have been held this summer. Tomorrow will be the 11th event. There have been over 6,000 visitors and 45 volunteers are on the solar list. - The highlight of the solar viewing season was the solar eclipse. Mike thanked everyone for their support and also especially to Bobby for all the media interviews. Yvonne noted that Bobby and Mike were really professional and relaxed with the interviews and handled them really well. Feedback from RMG was superb. RMG staff were on strike and there was some commentary from RMG picketing staff, but in the main, observatory staff were grateful for the support. It was questioned whether RMG would like feedback on the event, as some people felt mis-sold on the eclipse event itself. People believed they were going to be given eclipse glasses and viewing would be organised but instead

	the RMG elements seemed chaotic despite FAS input (which was recognised as being exceptional). Committee members expressed some sympathy for RMG, as the strike was only confirmed the day before. The committee agreed that FAS should not undersell its contribution. - The solar season ends next week and end-of-season drinks will be on 1st September. The new solar leaflet has now been printed, with 1,000 available. There are also 150 of the old version available. c. Blackheath observing - Mike updated that this is now organised and starts in mid-September, with dates agreed. It has not yet gone out for volunteers but will do so after solar observing. Poly attended the RMG volunteers event and noted that volunteers did not know about observing. It would be a good idea to put something into the RMG volunteers newsletter. Paul M and Simon will pick this up at the next meeting with RMG.
4	Lectures, Talks and Workshops Team
	a. Main lectures - Paul M noted that the upcoming season main lectures are all now booked. The September lecture invites have gone out and 10 lectures are organised. Paul M is in the process of handing over to Tony and Paul Me. There are some constraints around co-ordination as at present only one person can be added to the email list, due to email constraints around Microsoft authenticator. Frederik outlined a potential revised approach which he will speak to Simon about offline. - Paul M outlined that the previous year's roster for hosting, reporting and covering other roles worked really well and it was agreed to continue with this. Committee members volunteered as follows: - Hosting: Paul Me, Yvonne, Bobby, Alec, Clive and Frederik. - Reporting: Amy, Mike, Paul M, Alison, Alec and Tony. - Refreshments: Poly, Clive and Richard. (It would be good to have others helping with this too). - Tour: Mike and Bobby but this will only be possible until the ROG closes. An Astronomy Photographer of the Year tour is possible as an alternative, with the exception of September when the exhibition changes over. - Short talks: Yvonne, Mike, Bobby and possibly an Arts and Culture Special Interest group (SIG) member. We will email members to seek other volunteers. - Paul M will send round the proposed roster and people can comment. - The group discussed the AGM arrangements. Paul M will host and introduce Bobby for the AGM. Timings will be confirmed. Whilst there will not be a short talk there will be a members' slideshow. Alec is now taking this responsibility on as Barry is standing down. Five minutes are allocated for the slideshow. b. HoA and Special talks - Bobby noted that five talks are lined up. These include Pranjal Garg in October, Milton Mermikides in January, Mike Frost in March, Bobby himself in May, a members' talk on 25th May, and David Ingledew in June. Two further talks are to be confirmed, including Greg Rumsby and one individual. It was suggested that there could perhaps be a talk on the history of the observatory while the observatory is closed. Paul Me, Tony and Bobby will be running HoA. c. Workshops

	• Clive noted that we delivered workshops this year. There was good booking levels in the new location. The topics have been solar, smart telescopes, astro art, landscape astrophotography and citizen science. The plan is to do the same this coming year. The plan at present is as follows: ○ Smart scopes and telescopes with Mike on 6 October. ○ Image processing with an external astrophotographer on 1 December. ○ Citizen science with Paul and a FAS member on 2 February. ○ Landscape astrophotography on either 2 or 30 March, to be confirmed. ○ Astro Art on 20 April (this session will be held at Mycenae House).
5	Outreach and Events Team
	a. Outreach • Yvonne updated on the NLO visit tomorrow. Bobby will do the welcome talk and introduction to FAS. The group will come to solar observing, see the timetable, then have a tour and see the GET. The visit will finish at 5pm as some people are travelling back. There will be a drink at the Old Brewery at 5pm and a few members and committee members will come. In terms of access to ROG, Yvonne has been trying to sort out a discount, but FAS committee members with an RMG volunteer badge can take in four people each, so in fact it should mean that all NLO can have free access – 14 are expected. • Yvonne and Clive paid another visit to Severndroog Castle visit. It was not an official FAS event but was worthwhile, Another session is planned for 31st August. Severndroog would like to host another session in November with the 9th being suggested. There are some adjustments to the previous plan with different proposed logistics and time slots. A meeting will be held to agree the logistics. • School links will be picked up on return to term time. Meridian Primary School has invited FAS back and would like a visit when the moon rock they have ordered arrives. • The Shrewsbury Park event went well and was led by Richard. b. FAS visits/ trips • Amy updated on the Norman Lockyer Observatory (NLO) visit. 14 FAS members attended the NLO AstroFair on 26th June 2026. It was a great visit and it would be something we could encourage members to attend next year. The association with NLO continues as a group is visiting us tomorrow. • Poly updated on the trip to Oxford. 51 people are booked and all arrangements have been made. There needs to be a change to the meeting place but Poly will advise on this. The group is splitting into two groups and committee members are asked to support Poly on the day. The two guides are finalising their tours at present. • In terms of future trips, we have been in touch with Hampstead Scientific and Astronomical Society and we are keen to visit if this can be arranged. Amy will follow up again. It feels too soon to visit Mill Hill/ UCL observatory again. The Institute of Astronomy and the Mullard Observatory are possible but there may be challenges in arranging these. There is an open invitation to visit Kielder and it was agreed this was a positive but requires a 2-3 day trip. This was considered as a 2028 potential option. The Leicester Space Centre was also suggested. • An overseas option is being explored of visiting VIRGO in Tuscany. There was supported look into this. It was suggested this trip could include a few core astronomy related activities and that it could be more independent than La Palma. Amy will contact the various institutions and update the committee members.

	• Tony suggested that a future trip he would be keen to support is to the Paris Observatory, however, this is currently closed. • Committee members were asked to share views and ideas with Amy.
6	Media and Comms Team
	a. Social media update • Mike noted that there is nothing specific to update on social media overall. b. Special Interest Group (SIG) – Astronomy and Space in Art and Culture • Poly updated that the group is going well and still has 33 members. Poly will send an email after the AGM reminding people of the group and inviting people to join. It was suggested that something could be included in the new members' welcome email to let people know what the group is. Simon could share the new member email wording so it can be reviewed. • Poly also updated that at the NLO visit she met Janet Downing who runs their Culture and Astronomy group. There is a suggestion that NLO and FAS could share information and invite each other's members to our events. We may have less to invite them to, but it will nurture the relationship with NLO. Janet also suggested writing to the IAU, which has astronomy and culture links, and thinking about how to promote these groups in astronomy societies around the UK. Poly will email some ideas for committee feedback. • Poly also asked the committee for views on arranging a book evening. There was support for this and it was agreed that we could aim for eight books. Poly will co-ordinate. c. Connections with other societies • Bobby noted that it could be good to collaborate with other astronomy societies. In the past FAS has collaborated with BAA, RSA and Orpington Society. There is no formal list and we tend to be responsive to as things arise. It was noted that many FAS members are members of other societies. Reciprocal access could be explored, or London-wide astronomy events. It was agreed to carry on and progress as opportunities arise.
7	IT Team
	• There was nothing immediately to report on IT.
8	Any other business
	a. Branding refresh • Thanks were given to Alec for all of his hard work on the logo and the logo handbook. The committee and RMG have agreed to endorse the logo. b. Merchandise • Bobby still has some sweatshirts and polo shirts left. Committee members will consider if they want to purchase these. • The committee agreed that we should think about merchandising more broadly. Bobby will pick this up as a project. The committee needs to think about paying for this. c. Members discount • Clive raised the purchase of telescopes through RMG. There is a 10% discount as members. It was queried as to whether there is a 20% discount for volunteers.

	d. Specific roles - Gurinder asked whether the safeguarding policy had ever been ratified. Bobby confirmed that it had, but it had not yet come back from RMG. The final change was from names to roles. It is expected back when the MoU is returned. Gurinder was a named safeguarding lead and the committee needs to agree who takes this on. Gurinder noted that she is always available to support around safeguarding advice if needed. Bobby updated that the Data Protection Officer role is covered in RMG. e. Bobby's plans - Bobby updated that he will be away overseas for an extended period of time from October into the first half of November. f. Thanks - The committee formally thanked all retiring members of the committee and also Bobby again for his chairmanship.
9	Date of the next meeting TBC. Amy will arrange via WhatsApp for a date in November 2026.