

**Flamsteed Astronomy Society**  
**Committee Meeting - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February at 7pm via Zoom**  
**Notes to meeting**

**Present:**

Andy Sawers (Chair)  
Helen Edwards (Vice chair)  
Poly Philippou (Secretary)  
Barry Cassels  
Adrian Challinor  
Tej Dyal  
Roger Geeson  
Simon Hurst  
Clive Inglis  
Bobby Manoo  
Mike Meynell  
Nick Phillips  
Malcolm Porter

**Apologies:**

Asra Jilani  
Grey Lipleby

**1. Matters arising from the last committee meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

**Eddie Yeadon tributes** – There has been a piece in the BAA Journal, written by Andy, drawing largely from previous work by Mike Dryland and Eddie’s sister. Andy, Malcolm, Simon and Clive to meet within next couple of weeks to progress the memorial lecture and award previously discussed.

**Additional hosts /Q&A hosts / tech hosts for online events** - Andy extended his thanks to Simon, Tej, Adrian, Barry and Bobby for assisting with running the Zoom sessions. These have gone very well technically and have offered a better user-experience because of the preparation and practice by the ‘control booth’ team.

**AGM** – Since the last meeting, Andy has circulated the display panels setting out the mission for the Observatory, but noted that it wasn’t immediately obvious how the Flamsteed could contribute to enhance the strategy at this early stage.

**Budget update** - Andy has spoken with Chloe Shepherd in the Membership department. Budgets are still being discussed with Finance, they are difficult to predict at present, though it will be a tough year all round. We are ok with our Zoom licence and associated technology like Vimeo and occasional speakers’ fees, so we can continue as is for now. We are not currently offering a speaker fee as a matter of course unless it is expected to be required or is asked for. We will carry on with our own Zoom licence as it is not possible to share the Museum’s licence. Andy is still pursuing with Zoom a possible discount for us as a non-profit organisation. FAS costs are down this year as there are no costs for speaker travel, pre-lecture pub meals or museum staff on Monday evenings. And our membership numbers are holding up, though income has been affected by the extension of memberships beyond 12 months because of lockdown.

**Plans for events (including National Astronomy Week)** – To be discussed later in the meeting too. It was appreciated that we shared our Mars talk with other astronomy societies. In return, Crayford Manor very kindly invited us to their comets and eclipses talk. And Flamsteed members have been kindly invited by Havering AS to their June event at which particle physicist Dr Don Lincoln will be speaking. Drawing in other societies has been facilitated by the use of Zoom and therefore having an increased capacity of 500 participants.

## **2. Members' engagement with Zoom sessions**

Andy presented slides of viewing figures based on 7 recent representative main lectures on Zoom. This does not include other events such as HoA or workshops, or lectures where we invited other societies.

Slide 1 – This shows that an average of 143 people registered for these events and 110 attended, so a typical dropout rate of 23%. This figure is similar to dropouts at lectures in the lecture theatre. Attendance of 110 is a figure we could just about squeeze into the lecture theatre, Andy said, but we can book only up to the capacity of the theatre of 120; with dropout, lower numbers actually attend, so we typically have about 90 attending. There was some discussion about joint members viewing, more on this later, but the museum's system can hold only one email address for joint members. Adrian raised that some people have said they join lectures online that they would not attend in person if it's a subject they think might be too advanced. Mike also commented that it is easier to leave the lecture when online!

Slide 2 – This shows numbers who watched events live and those who watched on video later. An average of 170 watched each talk - 110 live plus 60 on video. These numbers are obviously higher than we would have in the lecture theatre.

Slide 3 – This shows how many people attended *exactly* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 lectures. Andy noted that 63 people attended just 1 lecture while 32 people who attended all 7.

Slide 4 – Shows how many people attended *at least* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 lectures. Range is 217 who attended at least 1 lecture to 32 who attended all 7. We do not know however if it's one person per device, or if households share a device or watch separately. We have 350 members if we count joint members as a single membership. So approximately two-thirds of our membership have watched least one main lecture. We could think later if we want to try to reach more of our members. Two thirds engagement is encouraging.

Slide 5 – Andy suggested a short membership survey specifically regarding our Zoom offering and proposed possible questions Agreed in principle though its purpose needs to be worked out. Adrian suggested we ask if they find the technology easy to use and Poly added asking what we could do differently to make it easier. Mike raised that we will hopefully be doing less online or more face-to-face soon as we move to normality over next 6 months or so and get back into the theatre, and should shape the questions based on the "new normal". Malcolm raised a concern that we might invite more negative than positive feedback and that it will not be representative. It was noted that previous feedback has been positive and that we do get good numbers responding. It was agreed we need to know more about our strategy, there was some discussion about using the survey to shape the strategy and help us decide our way forward versus having a clearer view and deciding our strategy and then deciding the questions from there. We do not yet know what the constraints or the "new normal" will be, and we do not yet know numbers that will be allowed in the lecture theatre. We await information from the Museum. We need to plan on various eventualities, online vs physical vs both. We know we have an "automatic" capacity constraint as our bookings are up online, let alone social distancing requirements. The survey can be used to present our requirements and drivers in discussions with RMG and NMM. We will come back to the survey later in the meeting.

## **3. Lecture planning for this and next season**

Andy reconfirmed we are ok for occasional speaker fees and we can carry on with booking lectures for now.

Chloe has asked that we let them know if we are going to approach someone high profile in case they are approaching the same person either for talks or as trustees and so to avoid any clashes/conflicts.

Helen will hold a meeting soon with a few people for next season's programme, with Mike, Andy, Bobby, Clive, Simon, Tej, Poly. May and June speakers are still tbc and discussion of this will be covered in this meeting/group. Helen to email all to get discussion going. Poly will do a Survey Monkey email to agree a date.

There was some discussion about whether we will hold lectures throughout the summer again, so for July and August. This will depend on the roadmap for easing restrictions, and members' and speakers' appetite for online talks at this time. Last year we decided this in May, and it was agreed to delay the decision till then again.

#### **4. Plans for other events**

Our next event is Malcolm's highlights talk next week. Malcolm will show his own images at the start of this event, so an alternative to our usual video introduction, a mini quiz with answers, was shown and agreed instead.

Andy reported that Chloe has advised that the Museum are keen to get the planetarium open again as a priority. No update yet on GET opening.

Poly reported that Janice confirmed that New Scientist have said that they will decide about NSL 2021 after Easter.

Other events such as offsite visits and trips, Blackheath and Romney observing, Solar viewings, GET visits will be discussed at the next meeting when the way forward is clearer.

Bobby, Andy and Tej will meet separately soon to discuss the virtual pub quiz.

#### **5. What our service offering might look like going forward**

Malcolm suggested we think about what different offerings we could do for our members, not just because of covid but more generally too, what else as well as e.g. Solar viewing, Blackheath observing, trips etc. We have historically attracted and kept hold of our members well, and to maintain this we need to continue to expand our offering and exploit new technologies. Mike thinks we should continue to exploit the appetite now for online capability but to get a balance right with the more social aspect of face-to-face. The balance of face-to-face vs recording vs live streaming vs combined is still to be confirmed, though we will be dependent on the technology available and offered by the Museum. Using the survey results we could determine what our members want and use this in discussions with the Museum.

Malcolm suggested other options which have been discussed before are radio astronomy and showing people meteorites. Clive reported that our VLF data is published every day to the website and he has been trying to engage with the Museum about widening this activity but with no success yet.

Tej has asked ROG re possibilities of them presenting planetarium shows or streaming observations from the observatory for our members, and is awaiting a response. Simon said that Greg has mentioned doing streaming events for members, Tej to get in touch with Greg to progress.

We need to get discussions going with the Museum. We need to decide first what is best for our membership.

There was a lot of discussion around options and ideas. It was decided this needed to be taken outside of this meeting, and ways of doing this were discussed. It was agreed that all should send their suggestions to Bobby, and Bobby will collate and write a paper of options which will be circulated to all and will arrange a meeting to discuss.

Roger pointed out that our elderly membership may well not want to attend face-to-face events and crowded environments post-covid.

#### **6. Any other business**

Andy advised that he and Helen will be meeting Patricia Skelton at the Museum who runs ThinkSpace lectures on Friday regarding what the programme is and if they can promote us in return for us promoting the programme.

Andy reported that the Museum has lost Insight as its sponsor for the photography awards and now are charging people £10 per person per 10 entries. Chloe has asked for ideas for how to replace sponsorship, sponsoring either overall or per specific award.

Barry asked if we will continue using WhatsApp or switch to something else such as Signal or Telegram. Adrian to look at feasibility of alternatives and discuss with Barry, and let the rest of the committee know the outcome.

It was agreed our next meeting will be in the second half of May. Poly to arrange this nearer the time.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

***Minutes issued 13/03/21***