

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 3rd September 2019 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Asra Jilani, Barry Cassels, Bobby Manoo, Clive Inglis, Grey Liple, Helen Edwards, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Rupert Smith and Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Christina Chester (vice-chair), Brian Blake, Roger Geeson and Simon Hurst.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on Thursday 23rd May 2019

Jodrell Bank Trip

Andy reported that the trip went very well, with 19 Flamsteed members in attendance. Travel arrangements worked well, and the weather was perfect. We also made some contacts with the Macclesfield Astronomical Society who were running a solar viewing event at Jodrell Bank on the day of our visit.

Potential Herstmonceux Trip

It was agreed that we wouldn't pursue a trip to Herstmonceux this season. Mike had tried to arrange another tour of the Space Geodesy Facility at Herstmonceux, but this hadn't been possible, as the facility no longer had funding to bring in staff at the weekends. Given that we had last visited Herstmonceux only 2 years ago, the committee felt that we should wait until next season before organising another visit.

BAA Back to Basics Day

Andy has been in contact with the BAA regarding the museum / Flamsteed hosting an event. The earliest date for this would be October 2021. We still had to work out the arrangements for charging attendees and for rental of the lecture theatre.

Andy reported that there was a BAA Back to Basics Day, hosted by the South West Herts Astronomical Society in Rickmansworth on Saturday 26 October if any members were interested in attending to look at the format of the day.

Aluna and Afyah Sisters Eid Event

Mike reported that the event went extremely well. The reaction of attendees to viewing the Crescent Moon was unlike any that we had witnessed before. We are likely to make this a regular fixture in our calendar.

Laura Williams from the Aluna project has been in touch about further events over the next few months. Unfortunately, the first event is on Saturday 14th September, which clashes with the Charlton & Woolwich Free Film Festival, that we had already agreed to support. However, there are likely to be further opportunities to cooperate over the coming season.

ROG Stranger Worlds event

Christina, Clive, Mike, Rupert and Tej represented the Flamsteed at this event. Our presence was much appreciated by the museum, and we were able to meet the new museum director, Paddy Rodgers.

"The Moon" exhibition – private view evening

Andy, Clive and Mike helped out at this event, with Simon providing a video of astrophotography images. The membership department at the museum were delighted that we were able to assist. We weren't as busy as hoped, but our presence at events such as these reinforces our links to the museum.

Partial Lunar Eclipse event

A Blackheath observing event was organised for this event on Tuesday 16th July. The weather was fine and the event was very well attended, both by members and non-members of the society.

Disabled Lift Issues

We understand that these issues have now been resolved, and were due to a lack of training of museum staff rather than any technical problem with the lift. We will continue to monitor at future lectures and advise the museum accordingly.

Flamsteed "sail" banner

Rupert stated that there was a huge variety of designs for this type of banner. In addition, we might want to investigate a branded tablecloth, which may be significantly cheaper. Andy agreed to perform some further investigation.

2. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) / Under-18s Update

Andy reported that the updated Memorandum of Understanding had been agreed with the museum. It will now go to Paddy Rodgers, museum director, for signature.

Insurance arrangements had been written into the MoU, which covers us for all events. In addition, a mechanism to allow the committee to appoint a temporary chair or vice-chair, in the event of the incapacity or unavailability of the incumbent, had been written into the MoU.

We still need to agree the operational process if we find a member under the age of 18 attending an off-site Flamsteed event without a parent or guardian. Andy agreed to come up with a written process, with the agreement of the museum, on what event organisers should do in this circumstance. We also need agreed wording on our policy which must be added to all booking emails for off-site events. Malcolm offered to assist by producing first drafts.

The Flamsteed currently has 3 "student" (i.e. 16-17 year-old) members.

3. Review of the 2018/19 season

Andy reported that the Flamsteed organised 85 events last season, with 65 actually run (the remainder being cancelled, in the main, due to the weather). Andy thanked the committee for all of their hard work in organising these events. Event numbers were similar to the previous couple of seasons.

Practical Astronomy

Rupert suggested that the Practical Astronomy workshops be revamped for the coming season, as attendance was down for certain workshops. The committee discussed whether we could combine short talks about a certain topic with a practical workshop to increase interest amongst the membership.

Rupert also suggested a workshop on “dark-sky areas”, giving members a guide on where to go to experience dark-skies. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea.

Mike suggested that we look to bring in external speakers rather than relying on society and committee members to deliver all the content. The committee agreed that this would be a good way forward.

Bobby and Helen felt that more introductory courses on basic astronomy topics would be well received.

In order to move things on, a sub-committee would meet to decide on how to approach these workshops for the coming season. Barry, Bobby, Grey, Helen, Malcolm, Mike, Nick, Rupert and Tej suggested that they would be interested in attending this sub-committee. Mike agreed to organise this after the AGM.

History of Astronomy Group

Malcolm had concerns that the same faces were putting their names forward to perform talks for the group. In order to freshen things up, the committee felt that it was worthwhile pursuing external speakers for at least 2 of the 5 scheduled talks in a season.

Public Solar Viewing

Tej reported on the public solar viewing sessions for summer 2019. Fifteen sessions were planned in total, with 8 sessions actually held. The remaining 7 were cancelled due to poor weather. This was a record number of sessions held during the summer. Tej thanked Simon, in particular, for all of his support in running the events. A total of 22 volunteers helped over the course of the summer, with 7 new volunteers coming forward after the training and solar talk in early-May.

Around 2,500 members of the public looked through the solar telescopes.

Solar activity was at a minimum, with no sunspots seen all summer. However, visitors were still treated to excellent views of prominences and smaller surface detail.

A new storage chest had been purchased by the museum. Tej had concerns about the condition of the 90mm solar-scope, as he felt that the brightness level had decreased. Rupert agreed to have a look at the solar-scope, and Tej agreed to make the arrangements for this to happen.

The committee thanked Tej for his great leadership of these events over the course of the summer. The museum always appreciate our presence and the reaction we get from members of the public make the events very worthwhile.

Great Equatorial Viewing events

Tej thanked Barry and Simon for their support in running these events. Six events were run in total, with use of the telescope possible in 3 of the sessions. AMAT viewings continued throughout the events and were well received.

As Tony Sizer has now left the museum, Tej agreed to contact the museum to find out who would be supporting these events during the 2019/20 season.

Members Solar Viewing

Clive reported that only 1 of our of 4 sessions were possible due to the weather. Clive suggested that a holder for a Smartphone be purchased so that members could attempt to take a photograph through

the eyepiece. Rupert had a spare Smartphone holder which he kindly agreed to lend to Clive so that this could be tried out.

4. Planned activities for 2019/20

Andy reported that the first lecture of the season, along with the AGM, would be on Monday 16th September.

Charlton & Woolwich Free Film Festival

Andy, Mike, Rupert and Tej agreed to help out at this event, to be held in Artillery Square, Woolwich, on Saturday 14th September at 7pm. The film "First Man" would be shown and we had agreed to run an observing event alongside the film showing. The Moon and Saturn should be visible.

Curator Tour of the Moon Exhibition

Andy reported that the museum had agreed to give a Flamsteed members a guided tour of the Moon exhibition at the National Maritime Museum. 22nd October has been suggested as a potential date for the tour.

New Scientist Live

The Flamsteed had agreed to participate in this exhibition once again, sharing the stand with the British Astronomical Association. This would take place on Sunday 13th October. Andy agreed to contact Janice McClean at the BAA to get further details. Andy, Clive, Grey, Mike and Nick agreed to help out at the event.

Volunteering for the Society

Bobby reported that a number of people had responded to the members survey suggesting that they were willing to get involved in helping the society. Mike suggested that we define the roles where we are seeking help, with a description of what the role requires and how much time needs to be committed. This could include simple tasks, such as chatting to attendees at observing events, helping to set up rooms for events, assisting in the catering prior to lectures, etc.

Andy suggested that an email be sent to those members who had expressed an interest in helping the society. This would be discussed again at the next committee meeting.

Observing Events

Dates for both the Blackheath and Romney observing events had been agreed and have been published on the Flamsteed website.

Apollo 13 Documentary

Andy reported that this screening had been agreed by the museum, and would take place on Tuesday 24th March 2020 in the planetarium.

Transit of Mercury

We are awaiting guidance from the museum on their plans for this event.

Pub Evenings

Mike asked if we would be continuing with the pub social evenings, given the poor attendance at these events. The venue has been moved several times, with no impact on attendance. Malcolm suggested using a WhatsApp group to encourage people to attend, so that members know who is attending. The committee agreed that this was a good idea, and we will look at pursuing this after the AGM.

Andy suggested that we could ask one of the ROG Astronomers along to give an informal talk about astronomy at the social event. The committee agreed that this should be pursued, and Andy agreed to speak to the museum.

Christmas Lecture

Andy asked if we should organise a raffle at our Christmas lecture. The committee agreed to pursue this, but there was no agreement on where the proceeds of the raffle should go. This would be raised again at the next committee meeting.

Society Visits

Clive asked if there were any ideas for visits over the course of the 2019/20 season. A visit to La Palma, specifically the Gran Telescopio Canarias and Isaac Newton Telescope, has been mentioned in the past. Clive and Malcolm agreed to make contact with some people who organise formal tours of the site. An update would be given at the next committee meeting.

5. Flamsteed AS 20th anniversary activities

December 2019 will see the 300th anniversary of the death of John Flamsteed. October 2019 sees the 20th anniversary of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society. Andy reported that we had arranged a special evening of talks about John Flamsteed for our Christmas lecture, to be given by Louise Devoy, Rebekah Higgitt and a PhD student of Rebekah's who is studying the early years of the Royal Observatory.

Andy stated that he had contacted Jane Bendall to find out details of an earlier society trip to Flamsteed's grave, to see if we could repeat this trip again. He would report back at a future committee meeting.

Mike pointed out that Eddie Yeadon and Jane Bendall had given a talk about the early years of the society at our 10th anniversary lecture. Andy and Grey agreed to contact them, along with Mike Dryland and Lin Potter, to see if something similar could be done for our 20th anniversary.

Malcolm asked if we could organise a dinner and/or evening out for the honorary members and current officers of the society, along with those who helped to found the society back in 1999 – namely Francisco Diego and Robert Massey. This would be picked up again at the next committee meeting.

6. Committee roles / AGM

Christina had indicated at the start of the 2018/19 season that she would be happy to serve as vice-chair for one further season. As she has now completed 3 years in the role, she felt that the start of the 2019/20 season would be the best time to stand down and allow for a new person to take over as vice-chair.

The committee recorded their thanks to Christina for all of her efforts over the last few years. She has agreed to be co-opted back on to the committee for the coming season.

Andy reported that Helen Edwards had agreed to put her name forward as a potential vice-chair of the society. The committee unanimously agreed to this, and thanked Helen for her commitment to the Flamsteed. Helen will be nominated at the AGM on Monday 16th September, and would obviously join the committee as a full member, with Christina becoming co-opted to the committee.

Mike reported that no nominations had been received from the membership, and no resignations received from existing committee members, so the committee would retain the same members for the 2019/20 season. Committee members were reminded that they should try to encourage members to get involved over the course of the season.

7. Any other business

Car insurance

Andy reminded committee members to check their car insurance details to ensure that they are covered for volunteer events. Andy will also raise this with the museum.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.57pm.