

## **Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2014 in Mycenae House at 7.00 p.m.**

Present: Malcolm Porter (Chairman), Mike Meynell (Vice Chairman), Brian Blake, Christina Chester, Lin Potter, Nick Phillips and Rupert Smith.

Apologies: Grey Liple (Vice Chairman), Asra Jilani, Roger Geeson and Sumitra Sri Bhashyam.

### 1. Matters Arising:

#### Membership Renewals and the Booking System

The numbers of problems experienced with the new membership system are gradually starting to decrease. The museum is now providing us with a list of “lapsed” members (i.e. those members whose subscriptions have expired, who are given 3 months to renew). Data integrity issues are being resolved, though a few problems have been found with the latest extract of membership data, which will be raised with the museum.

We have received a few complaints from members regarding the lecture booking system. Some members still find the system difficult to use and slow. Members are also forgetting their user names, and it is not obvious how to get a reminder of this information.

Some committee members either do not have membership cards, or have a card that doesn't work. If this is widely reflected across the society, then there may be a larger issue. Malcolm and Mike agreed to raise this with the membership manager, Chris Hill, at their next meeting.

#### Digital Strategy

No progress has been made on this, but we will look to form a sub-committee on this during the coming season, following the AGM.

#### Purchases from the Reserve Fund

The list of purchases has been agreed and confirmed with the Royal Observatory. The process for purchasing the items appears to have stalled over the summer break, most likely due to staff unavailability as a result of holidays and conferences. However, Malcolm is continuing to chase and will update the committee with any progress.

#### Setting up an Online Discussion Forum

The online discussion forums went live on 10 June 2014, timed deliberately for the close season so that we would have a chance of resolving any issues before the new season commenced in September.

As of 4 September, a total of 872 posts have been made, averaging around 11 posts per day. As the forum was made active during the close season break, we agreed that this was a positive start. Hopefully activity will increase as the new season commences.

There have been a few technical issues, which have gradually been resolved. We are continuing to monitor performance of the forum, and the website in general, to see if we can improve performance further or determine if we need to switch website hosting to a virtual private server. We are also experimenting with an automated news feed to add content directly to the news area on the website.

### Public Solar Viewing Events at the ROG

Nick reported that we were able to run 5 out of the 8 planned public solar viewing events at the ROG over the summer period. All of the events went very well, and we have a good pool of new volunteers to help out at these sessions.

The committee agreed to try and encourage more members to get involved and also to encourage those who wish to run these sessions to become official museum volunteers. Malcolm suggested circulating a list at the first lecture of the season, where members could add their names if they wish to become more involved in helping out at society events.

### Members Solar Viewing Events at the ROG

The museum agreed to our proposal to run these events and Nick reported that 3 out of the 4 members solar viewing events took place, though one of these was entirely clouded out. The reaction from Flamsteed members was extremely positive and everyone seemed to enjoy having lots of time to look through the solar telescopes and chat about the Sun and other topics.

We agreed to it would be nice to extend the time available for these sessions, and we would pursue this with the museum next year. We also agreed that the sessions could start earlier in the year, perhaps in May. The committee thanked Nick for driving this forward and making the events such a success.

### Shrewsbury Park Summer Festival

Unfortunately, due to the threat of lightning and rain, we had to cancel our involvement in this event. The Friends of Shrewsbury Park were keen to stay in touch with the Flamsteed with a view to holding future events on the site.

We agreed to pursue further events of this nature in the future.

### Honorary Membership Guidelines

Malcolm agreed to come up with a set of guidelines for presentation at a future committee meeting. He confirmed that the museum had to approve any request from the committee to make a person an honorary member.

#### CERN and Herstmonceux Trips:

Within a two-week period in June, the trips to CERN and Herstmonceux took place and were both very successful. 24 people attended the CERN trip and 30 attended the Observatory Science Centre in Herstmonceux. Excellent feedback has been received from attendees and full reports of the trips are available on the website.

#### Flamsteed Star Camp

Unfortunately, Rupert has been unable to arrange for this event at our chosen campsite, as the owner of the site would not keep the site open for long enough to coincide with a date close to the New Moon in October. There may be an option to use the site in the spring, before the site opens for normal business.

Lin made the committee aware of the Elmley Nature Reserve on the Isle of Sheppey, less than an hour drive away. Lin knows the owner of this site and they would be very happy to accommodate the Flamsteed. The site has accommodation available with toilet facilities. We agreed to investigate the site further, with the same team involved in the recce of the site in Romney last year. Lin agreed to pass on contact details.

#### Royal Astronomical Society Anniversary

We understand that the ROG are involved in this initiative, so the Flamsteed would offer to support any project that the ROG put forward.

#### Vanbrugh Community Association at Mycenae House

Flamsteed membership of the Vanbrugh Community Association has been confirmed. Mike reported that the Vanbrugh Community Association had been very supportive and were keen on the Flamsteed hosting events on the site. We agreed that we would use Mycenae House for a future programme of workshops on observing and imaging, as well as all future committee meetings.

## 2. Society Activities for 2014/15 Season:

Malcolm took the committee through an outline presentation to the AGM.

#### Lecture Programme

All lectures for the 2014/15 season are now scheduled with assigned speakers. Some lecture titles are still outstanding, as certain speakers want to keep their talk as topical as possible.

Brian stated that he had been approached by a small number of members about the possibility of having lecturers from overseas giving talks to the society via Skype. The committee did not support this idea, as the preference is for speakers to be in the same room as the members. We do not seem to have a problem in attracting speakers to the society, so this idea would not be pursued.

### Special Interest Groups

Mike stated that some members had asked about the possibility of starting a Cosmology Special Interest Group. There was some concern that a group along these lines would detract from the main Flamsteed programme, and it was not immediately clear what the aims and objectives of the group would be. There is no capacity within the existing committee to set up and run such a group, but the committee agreed that if we were approached again about this topic, then we would look at this again.

### Great Equatorial Viewing and Imaging Events

Nick kindly agreed to run the viewing events with the Great Equatorial telescope again this season. He will contact the ROG to get our usual 8 dates for these events during the season. Two of these events will be used for special imaging sessions with the Great Equatorial telescope. Some discussion took place on trying to introduce some variety into these evenings, particularly when we are prevented from viewing through the telescope due to poor weather. For example, instead of having a general “Sky Tonight” presentation, we could advertise a talk about a specific topic in advance, which would take place in the event of poor weather. This may mean that it would be better to share the burden of these events across more than one ROG astronomer. Mike agreed to discuss this with the museum, and the relevant ROG astronomers, after the dates for the sessions had been proposed.

### Imaging Workshops

Some discussion took place regarding the provision of imaging workshops to Flamsteed members in the coming season. Sumitra has proposed that we look at setting themes and goals for workshops and invite members to present their images. We could also think about introducing an internal competition for images, which participants could vote on. There was general support for this idea. Workshop themes could be set in advance and participants could then attempt images that could be discussed within a workshop environment. The online discussion forums would also support this activity, as people could ask questions before and after the workshops. Several levels of workshop could be covered, from basic DSLR astrophotography, themes like dealing with light pollution using hardware and software, solar imaging and then on to planetary and deep sky

imaging. Rupert agreed to come up with a proposal on a series of workshops for the coming season.

### Media Support

The total solar eclipse on 20 March 2015 was discussed. Though the path of totality is from just below Greenland, heading north into the Arctic Circle, there will be a large partial solar eclipse visible from London from around 8.30am to 10.40am, with 84% of the Sun covered at 9.30am. There is likely to be intense media interest in this event, so we need to be prepared well in advance.

Brian asked about any potential involvement from the Flamsteed in BBC Stargazing Live. There has been no information forthcoming from the BBC about any event, but Mike agreed to keep the committee informed should there be an approach. The same applies to the BBC Sky at Night team.

### Overseas Trips

Potential future overseas trips were discussed. The committee agreed to pursue another overseas trip this season. Various potential sites were discussed, including La Palma, but it was agreed that we should initially approach Kathy Griffiths with regards to arranging a potential Flamsteed trip to the Griffon Educational Observatory in El Bosque, Andalucía, Spain.

### Financial Arrangements

It was agreed that we would pursue the possibility of having a bank account for the Flamsteed in order to make the administration of small purchases easier. Malcolm and Mike would raise this at their next meeting with the museum.

### Public Telescope and Imaging Workshops

The committee agreed to continue to offer the same number of public telescope and imaging workshops as in previous seasons. Mike would approach the museum to get some proposed dates for these events.

### Contact with Other Societies

Contact has been made with the Wealden Astronomical Society, and Flamsteed members will be attending their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary party at Herstmonceux in October. Mike has spoken to the radio astronomy group at the Norman Lockyer Observatory, and they were keen for the Flamsteed to arrange a visit.

Potential visits to other societies and locations were discussed; e.g. Croydon, Mill Hill, Institute of Astronomy, etc, and some of these will be pursued in the coming season.

## Membership of the BAA

It was agreed that the Flamsteed Astronomy Society would apply for membership of the BAA as an affiliated society. As an Affiliated Society we would be eligible for one person to come along to a BAA meeting at a reduced member's rate. Mike would apply for membership on behalf of the society.

## Structure of the Committee

Given the increased number of events organised by the society (70 in the last season), and the fact that we currently have 355 members, there was a view that we needed to get more people involved in running the society. It was agreed that, during the coming season, we would look at restructuring the committee, potentially increasing the number of participants, but also looking at introducing a two-level structure within the committee.

### 3. Committee Roles / Nominations / AGM:

Nominations have been received from Andy Sawers, Clive Inglis and Tej Dyal. It was agreed that all three members would make for great additions to the committee, and we looked forward to welcoming them on board.

Lin Potter, Asra Jilani and Sumitra Sri Bhashyam would stand down from the committee at the next AGM. As three people have been nominated and three will stand down, a ballot will not be necessary.

In order that the History of Astronomy special interest group is represented, it was agreed to co-opt Mike Dryland on to the committee at the first committee meeting after the AGM. In addition, Lin Potter, Asra Jilani and Sumitra Sri Bhashyam would be co-opted back to the committee in order to aid in the running of the society, both in giving advice and performing specific duties to be determined.

This would leave us with 11 full committee members and 4 co-opted members for the new season. During the course of the coming season, we would look at amending the Memorandum of Understanding with the museum, in order to reflect the increased numbers of people needed to run a society of our current size.

### 4. Any Other Business:

#### Outreach Solar Observing Event: 19 September

On 19 September, we plan to run an outreach solar observing event at the Royal Observatory Greenwich. Stephen Ramsden, the founder and director of the Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project, the highest volume astronomy outreach non-profit programme

in the world, is in the UK at that time. Rupert has been in touch with him, and we have organised this event to coincide with his visit.

This would be a solar viewing event, potentially with several telescopes available. We also have a room available in the South Building from 3.30pm to 5pm on the day, where Stephen Ramsden can give a talk about solar observing.

We are still in negotiation with the museum about what space we could use and also if there are any options for wet-weather provision.

Publicity for the event would be via the usual Flamsteed channels and also via the BBC "Things to Do" page. Rupert agreed to put together a narrative regarding the event so that it could be publicised via these channels.

### Solar Observing Media

Nick advised that he had been working on an updated version of the solar observing media that we use at public solar observing events.

Mike had contacted Pete Lawrence, who has kindly provided an image that we could use, which looks similar to the view that a person has through an H-alpha solar telescope. Nick has worked on this image, annotating it with descriptions of the main features that you could see through the scope e.g. prominences, filaments, sunspots, plages, etc. It's planned that our volunteers can then use this image to 'prime' an attendee on what they should look out for when they get to the telescope.

Christina agreed to take the media files from Nick when they are completed and arrange for some copies to be printed and laminated.

### IAU Name Exo-Worlds Contest

Christina informed the committee that the IAU is organising a worldwide contest to give popular names to a number of exoplanets along with their host stars.

Astronomy clubs and other astronomy based non-profit organisations are to be given the opportunity to submit proposed names. These will then be put out to the worldwide public to cast a vote and then the IAU will have final say.

We agreed that this would be a great activity for the Flamsteed to be involved in. Christina agreed to look into signing us up for this. We need to think about how to manage our submission, but it would most likely take the form of asking for ideas on names and then submitting the names to a vote by society members.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed at 9.25pm.