

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Thursday 27th February 2020 at 7pm in Mycenae House, Blackheath

[Also included are further notes from the informal committee meetings held on Thursday 9th April and Thursday 18th June via Zoom]

Present (27th February): Andy Sawers (chair), Helen Edwards (vice-chair), Barry Cassels, Bobby Manoo, Clive Inglis, Grey Libley, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Poly Philippou and Roger Geeson.

Apologies: Asra Jilani, Christina Chester, Rupert Smith, Simon Hurst and Tej Dyal.

1. Matters arising from the committee meeting on Monday 14th October 2019

Disabled Lift Issues

We understand that the disabled lift outside the lecture theatre at the National Maritime Museum is being replaced in March 2020, so hopefully this will finally resolve the issue.

Memorandum of Understanding / Under-18s

Andy and Malcolm agreed to distribute draft guidance on operational procedures for 16 and 17 year-olds attending Flamsteed events. Andy also agreed to review the draft guidance with Lance Bourne at the ROG.

Mike asked Andy to come up with a single-sentence guideline to be added to all Flamsteed off-site event emails to members.

Practical Astronomy Workshops

Mike reported that Rupert was in the process of developing a Spectroscopy workshop. This would not be ready for the March date, so we will target the April practical astronomy booking for this workshop.

History of Astronomy Group

Bobby reported that the meetings had all gone well so far. Meetings are fully scheduled for this season, and speakers for 50% of the meetings for next season have already been found.

Great Equatorial Viewing events

Tej has produced a summary of the 6 dates held so far this season. Viewing through the telescope has been possible on 3 out of the 6 events. There are two further events this season – 3rd and 10th March.

Curator Tour of the Moon Exhibition

Andy reported that the initial event on 22nd October went very well. Demand from the membership was very high, so a second event was arranged for 18th November, which was also fully booked. The committee passed on their thanks to Louise Devoy, curator at the ROG, for helping to run these events.

Transit of Mercury

A short-notice event took place at the ROG on Monday 11th November, and was very successful.

Pub Evenings

As Tom Kerss and Brendan Owens have now left the museum, Andy stated that we would approach some of the other astronomers at the ROG to see if they'd like to take part in a "beer with an astronomer" evening.

There was some discussion on the merits of WhatsApp and Telegram as messaging systems for members. The WhatsApp group for the Flamsteed committee had proved to be useful, but there was some concern about releasing this to all members, relating to the maximum number of users and privacy concerns. Bobby agreed to continue with the testing of the Telegram app.

Christmas Lecture

Funds raised at the Christmas Lecture came to £321, which was donated to buy astronomy-related books for the Charlton Park Academy School (a special academy for students with complex, low incidence special educational needs). A number of committee members will be visiting the school in the next few days.

Lecture Theatre technical issues

Andy reported that we were now providing very detailed step-by-step technical notes for our museum technician at our monthly lectures.

2. Lectures for remainder of 2019/20 season

Our May lecturer has had to pull out, and we were still looking for a lecturer to fulfil the June date. Helen reported that she was in touch with potential speakers for both events.

3. Solar viewing session for 2020 – public and members

Clive reported that he had sent in 5 suggested Tuesday evening dates to the ROG for members solar viewing sessions. He had not yet received confirmation of these dates.

Tej has also sent in 12 suggested dates for public solar viewing dates. Again, confirmation from the museum is yet to be received.

4. Project NME – New Members' Experience

Andy reported that he has asked Asra and Helen to review the procedures for new Flamsteed members. This should also concentrate on streamlining our event communications, in particular using Eventbrite to distribute access instructions when a member books to attend an event, rather than continually sending out separate emails to the entire membership.

5. Lecture refreshment duties

Roger requested some assistance at the March lecture to help with providing refreshments.

6. Bite-sized introduction sessions

Bobby suggested running a series of “introduction to astronomy” sessions to members over the next few months. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea. Bobby agreed to distribute his proposed lecture notes to the committee for any comments and further suggestions.

7. Society trips

Clive gave an update on the proposed trip to La Palma, in particular to the Gran Telescopio de Canarias and the William Herschel Telescope. Trips can only be confirmed 2 months prior to the travel date. Malcolm reported that flights may be an issue, as we don’t have the flight schedules beyond the end of March. Direct flights take less than 5 hours, whereas indirect flights via Madrid can take around 8-13 hours. Around 20 Flamsteed members have expressed an interest in the trip.

Malcolm agreed to do some further investigation on potential flight times.

Poly reported that a tour of the UCL observatory had been arranged for 25th April. The group size has been set with a maximum of 24 people. Cost per person should be around £10. A booking email will be sent to members in the next couple of weeks with details on how to pay.

8. Lecture planning for 2020/21 season

Helen updated the committee on planning for lectures for next season. Helen, Andy, Clive, Malcolm and Mike had met last week to discuss potential topics and speakers. Mike agreed to circulate the notes of the discussion to the whole committee.

All lecture dates for the 2020/21 season have been agreed with the museum and the lecture theatre has been booked.

9. Flamsteed and New Scientist Live 2020

Grey reported that he was going to meet with Janice McClean of the BAA in a few weeks, with the assistance of Poly and Rupert, in order to discuss how the Flamsteed can assist on the BAA stand at New Scientist Live this year.

10. National Astronomy Week (14th to 22nd November 2020)

Mike reported that National Astronomy Week is due to take place in mid-November. This is timed for the period around a month after Mars has reached opposition, meaning that it will be well placed for evening observations.

National Astronomy Week is funded by the Science & Technology Facilities Council and the Royal Astronomical Society, amongst others.

The committee agreed that we should run an observing event to coincide with this event.

In addition, it was suggested that the November lecture be on a “Mars” theme.

Andy agreed to contact the ROG to see if they had any events planned to coincide with National Astronomy Week.

11. Any other business

BAA – Back to Basics

Andy reported that he was meeting with the BAA in the next few weeks to discuss the Flamsteed hosting a “Back to Basics” workshop at the museum. The likely date would be autumn 2021.

Mike mentioned that we should be able to offer attendees a tour of the ROG on the day of the event.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Further notes from informal committee meetings held on Thursday 9th April and Thursday 18th June via Zoom

Thursday 9th April via Zoom

Present (9th April): Andy Sawers (chair), Helen Edwards (vice-chair), Asra Jilani, Bobby Manoo, Christina Chester, Clive Inglis, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Roger Geeson and Simon Hurst.

1. As a result of the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic, all Flamsteed face-to-face events have been cancelled. All talks and workshops have been moved online, using Zoom as our main platform.
2. On Sunday 22nd March, Andy and Mike ran the first test Zoom event, which was very well received. Since then, we have run a film screening and the April lecture.
3. Andy updated the committee on our lecture plans for the remainder of the season, and for early next season. The working assumption is that all events for the remainder of this season would be held online, and potentially some lectures early next season.
4. Online events so far had gone very well. Event recordings are being posted to Vimeo, with some events being password-protected so that only members can view. Password-protection would be at the request of the lecturer. Our default position would be password-protection on all events, and speakers would then be asked if they were happy for the recording to be open to all.
5. There has been a suggestion that we add subtitles to events. It was agreed that we would trial some software (e.g. Amara or Otter) to see how time-consuming this would be.
6. Bobby reported that several History of Astronomy talks had been arranged, and would be held online.
7. Mike agreed to run an astrophotography workshop within the next week or so, and Andy agreed to co-host.
8. Bobby and Simon agreed to become additional hosts for our online events, to support Andy and Mike.
9. It was agreed that we would continue with the monthly social evenings, with the meetings held on Zoom. Some topics for discussion would be useful.
10. The potential for an online pub quiz was discussed. Bobby agreed to investigate how this could be done.

11. Tej has suggested the potential for live-streaming a solar-viewing session. The committee agreed that it was worthwhile pursuing this idea, but the hardware requirements would need to be determined.
12. Mike agreed to create some “Sky this Month” videos for distribution to the membership.
13. Bobby agreed to run his “Introduction to Astronomy” sessions via Zoom.
14. Andy agreed to distribute an email to members detailing the various online events, podcasts and books which are available at the moment.
15. The committee agreed to park the potential usage of the Telegram Messenger app until a future date. It was not entirely clear what it would be used for during the period of lockdown.
16. It was clear that many members wanted to continue with an online offering in the long-term, post lockdown. The committee agreed that we should pursue this, but it wasn’t clear what the approach would be – either live-streaming or recording and broadcast afterwards. Clearly a live-streaming approach would have technological challenges, and may impact on physical attendance at events. It was important to have a face-to-face experience on the evening of an event, so recording the event might be the better approach. In this case, members could view a few days after the event has taken place without significantly impacting on physical attendance at the event.

Thursday 18th June via Zoom

Present (18th June): Andy Sawers (chair), Helen Edwards (vice-chair), Adrian Challinor, Asra Jilani, Barry Cassels, Bobby Manoo, Clive Inglis, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Nick Phillips, Poly Philippou, Rupert Smith and Simon Hurst.

1. Andy welcomed Adrian Challinor to the committee as a co-opted member.
2. Poly informed the committee that New Scientist Live 2020 had been cancelled. Grey, Rupert, Poly and Janice McClean had met back in March to discuss arrangements for our involvement on the BAA stand. The next New Scientist Live event will be held on Sunday 17th October 2021.
3. Andy, Helen and Bobby gave an update on planned events for the remainder of the season. It was agreed that we would continue with the main lecture programme throughout the summer months, scheduling lectures for July and August. Helen would pursue speakers for these events.
4. Andy has approached the ROG to see if any of the astronomers would like to give an online talk to the society.
5. Andy confirmed that the next AGM would be separated from the September lecture, as a distinct event evening. It was agreed to offer something on top of the AGM. Malcolm and Mike agreed to put a “Sky this Year” video together for broadcast at the event. It was also suggested that we try to get Paddy Rodgers, museum director, to speak at the AGM. Andy agreed to contact Paddy to see if he was interested in taking part.
6. The committee discussed the future of the Flamsteed discussion forum on the website. It was agreed to archive the forum and remove it from the main website, due to lack of usage.
7. It was agreed to use our existing Twitter and Facebook social media channels to push our content to members and the wider astronomy community. Mike requested that committee members review some of the existing videos and choose some 2-minute segments that could be posted on Twitter and our existing Facebook page.
8. Andy agreed to push out some ideas on how Flamsteed would operate post-lockdown, exploring how to continue with our online offering.