

Notes from a Flamsteed Astronomy Society Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 26th August 2020 at 7pm via Zoom

Present: Andy Sawers (chair), Helen Edwards (vice-chair), Barry Cassels, Bobby Manoo, Clive Inglis, Malcolm Porter, Mike Meynell, Poly Philippou, Rupert Smith, Simon Hurst and Tej Dyal.

Apologies: Adrian Challinor, Asra Jilani, Christina Chester, Grey Liple, Nick Phillips and Roger Geeson.

1. Matters arising from committee meeting held on Thursday 27th February 2020 (and informal committee meetings held on Thursday 9th April and Thursday 18th June via Zoom)

Practical Astronomy Workshops

Rupert reported that the proposed Spectroscopy workshop would work better when face-to-face meetings are possible again, as it involved a number of practical demonstrations which would be difficult to perform in an online setting.

Great Equatorial Viewing events

Tej reported that the museum were looking to re-open the Great Equatorial Telescope from January 2021. When we receive further information from the museum, we will assess if it is possible to run any members events.

Project NME – New Members' Experience

As there are no face-to-face events at present, this has been placed on hold. Andy and Helen agreed to review the procedure for sending a welcome email out to new members.

Bite-sized introduction sessions

Bobby ran 3 online "introduction to astronomy" sessions, which were extremely well received by the membership. The committee thanked Bobby for all of his work.

Society Trips

No progress, as a result of the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic.

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

Our November lecture would be on the theme of Mars. In addition, if we are able to run an online observing session at around this time, then Mars would be our main observing target. Andy agreed to contact the ROG to find out their plans.

BAA – Back to Basics

Andy agreed to contact the BAA to move this forward. It was unknown if the BAA schedule had been changed as a result of the recent cancellation of meetings.

2. Review of the 2019/20 season

Andy agreed to put together a summary of all 2019/20 events for presentation at the AGM. Andy thanked all committee members who had assisted in running events, both prior to the lockdown period in March, and after lockdown with the production of numerous online events.

The committee were planning on how to operate through any potential lockdown period prior to the lockdown being announced, so we were well prepared to hit the ground running. As a result, we started to offer online events well before most other societies, both local and national. Some societies had completely closed during this period, so it was very pleasing that we were still able to offer high-quality events to our members.

Attendance at our online events have been at least comparable to, and usually well in excess, of the number who attend in person, so it was clear that there is a great deal of demand for our online offering.

3. Planned activities for 2020/21

Lectures

Helen reported that she had lined up speakers for the first 3 lectures of the season – September, October and November. All lectures would be held online. It seemed likely that the December lecture would also be held online, so Helen was planning on that basis. Some potential speakers for the Christmas lecture were discussed.

The committee agreed that any return to the museum lecture theatre was likely to be phased, and would not take place until the New Year. On the assumption that we would not be able to use the full capacity of the lecture theatre, due to potential social distancing guidelines, the committee agreed that we must explore the potential for live-streaming any lectures held in the lecture theatre for those members who are unwilling or unable to attend in person.

Discussions would take place with the museum when it was clear that we could start to use the lecture theatre again.

Online lectures gave us the opportunity to have lecturers from outside of the UK. Barry asked if it would be possible to have overseas speakers via a video-link in the lecture theatre when we were able to return. The committee agreed that this was an excellent idea, though obviously we would need to discuss the technological challenges with the museum.

History of Astronomy Group

Andy and Bobby suggested that all History of Astronomy group meetings should take place online for the coming season. These talks have a limited capacity when run face-to-face, and this capacity could be reduced even further if social distancing is still required. The talks have been very popular when run online, with attendance figures around double the normal numbers. The committee agreed with the proposal.

Bobby had 5 possible speakers lined up, but only 1 would be able to give a talk before the end of 2020. It was suggested that we try to approach some external speakers to see if we could have some additional speakers this year. Bobby agreed to pursue this, and would update the committee on progress at a later date.

Observing

Mike agreed to investigate the feasibility of running online observing events, streaming a live view from a telescope, or a number of telescopes, to members. Tej and Rupert agreed to assist. We would initially run an event for committee members only, to see if it was worthwhile running events for all society members.

Rupert suggested using “night-vision” eyepieces to reveal live-view detail in objects that it would not be possible to see with the unaided eye. It was also agreed that we should develop short talks around the objects that we intend to view, in order to hold the viewers interest in the session.

Other Potential Events

Andy is working on a couple of potential events, which he will update the committee on at a later date. Both are music related, so would require a license from the Performing Rights Society.

Andy also suggested a potential talk from an astro-photographer called Andrew McCarthy, who is based in the USA. The talk would be more about the composition of images, rather than being technically based. Andy presented some of Andrew’s images, which the committee agreed were of an excellent standard. Andy agreed to contact Andrew to see if he would be interested in giving a talk to the society.

It was agreed that we would try to run the pub quiz in November.

Fundraising

We have had a Christmas raffle for the last couple of seasons. Obviously, this will be difficult to achieve this year, so it was suggested that we set up a JustGiving account (or equivalent) to allow members to donate to our charity of choice this year.

4. Inviting other societies to Flamsteed online events

The committee agreed that we should occasionally invite other astronomy societies to attend our online events, but that this should be the exception rather than the norm. We could perhaps target one or two lectures per season.

5. Additional hosts / Q&A hosts / tech hosts for online events

Barry and Tej agreed to help out at our online events, work permitting. Andy, Bobby, Mike and Simon agreed to continue to assist. The committee thanked all those who have been involved in setting up these events.

6. Woolwich & Charlton Free Film Festival

Though the festival may take place later in the year, it doesn’t seem likely that any observing could take place. The committee agreed that we would not take part this year, so Andy will contact the organisers to inform them of our decision.

7. AGM – process for election of officers / nomination of committee members

Andy informed the committee that Paddy Rodgers, RMG Director, had agreed to say a few words to the society at the AGM. It was agreed that this would form part of the formal AGM.

It was agreed that the election process would take place by asking for proposers and seconders to raise their hand using the Zoom functionality. The Zoom poll functionality can then be used to allow attendees to vote.

It was also agreed to allow members to submit questions via the Zoom Q&A functionality.

Mike agreed to chair the meeting during the election of the chair and vice-chair.

8. Committee roles

Andy agreed to put his name forward as chair for the 2020/21 season, but stated that this would be his final year as chair. Helen agreed to put her name forward as vice-chair. The committee fully supported these nominations.

Rupert informed the committee that he was intending to stand down from the committee at the AGM, due to pressures of work. The committee recorded their sincere thanks to Rupert for all of his efforts over the 7 years that he has served on the committee. Rupert stated that he was still willing to run workshops, which was very much appreciated by all committee members.

As Brian Blake stepped down shortly after the September 2019 AGM, there were now 2 vacancies for full committee members. Poly and Barry (currently co-opted members) agreed to submit their names to become full committee members. The committee fully supported these nominations.

Mike reported that no further nominations had been received from the membership.

9. Any other business

No further business.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.46pm.