

The fourth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the National Maritime Museum Astronomy Society (The Flamsteed Astronomy Society)

Held in the South Building of the Royal Observatory Greenwich on Tuesday 7th October 2003 at 8.00 p.m.

Present: 24 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society

Apologies: Gloria Clifton, Robert Massey, Maxine Green, Keith Jones, Jack Rodin, Nicki Bearcroft and Chris Munro

Matters arising: The minutes of the third Annual General Meeting of the FAS held on Tuesday 1st October 2002 were approved by the meeting. There were no matters arising.

Chairman's report:

The Society has now completed its fourth year of existence, and this has proved to be a milestone in acceptance and recognition. At the beginning of the year we had discussions with Polly Lerner about our accumulating reserve account. You will remember that this has been a touchy subject, which I have tried to explain before. When the FAS was set up, we were on probation. Nobody knew how successful we were going to be, so a constitution was framed which would limit the extent to which Friends would be financially responsible if the whole thing flopped. As a result, the Committee thought it advisable to keep a reserve fund big enough to cover any accrued liabilities, like VAT which was being negotiated between the Museum and HMCE. Well I am now glad to be able to report that the Friends of the Maritime Museum have agreed now to cover such liabilities. We have been recognised as an established and valuable part of Friends, which is not going to go bust. As a result of this, the accumulated contingency fund has become available for charitable purposes within the Museum, and after talks with Gloria Clifton and Robert Massey we decided to make our first substantial donation in the form of a Hydrogen-alpha telescope to be used by the Observatory for education and for public viewings.

The year has seen the usual series of monthly meetings here on a variety of interesting topics. I would like to mention in particular the lecture on pulsars by Jocelyn Bell-Burnell in the spring. We are very fortunate in being able to use the reputation of the ROG and Greenwich to get such eminent speakers. We have also been able to keep contact with members during the summer, with a picnic in July, observing the opposition of Mars in August, and an enjoyable Sundial Trail through London in September. Although these summer outings were not so well attended as the regular winter meetings, they do give the opportunity for social contact and for chatting about astronomy.

Also worth mentioning is the day when the Queen opened the "Elizabeth" exhibition at the Museum in May, where I was invited, as chairman of FAS, to an informal gathering with the Royal party after the opening. Although I was the one to get the cup of tea and the biscuit, the honour of being represented goes to the whole Society. As I said earlier, we have now been recognised as part of the establishment here. Looking to the future, the Committee has arranged an interesting programme for the year, which you will all have seen by now. The significant astronomical event will be the transit of Venus in June, and David and Martin will be saying something about

this later. We have also been able to arrange for David Sellers, the author of a book on the history and science of transits, to deliver the Star lecture in the spring. Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for making the last year so successful. And, as usual, special thanks to Jane who is the one who puts so many of the Committee's decisions into practice and makes our meetings here go so well.

Report from the Observing Group

Mike Iveson has taken over coordination of the observing group from Stephen Wakeford and Rose Dowd. He introduced himself to new members and invited those present to give him their name and contact details if they are interested in joining in the group's activities.

The group had a good summer with clear skies. Several people had visited Martin and Jane Male's excellent viewing facilities at Romney Marsh and everyone would like to thank them again for their continuing hospitality. On one very special evening they were lucky enough to see the Eagle and Lagoon nebulae, Andromeda galaxy, double stars and several satellites.

There was a most successful occasion at Cudham when about 15 people turned out on a beautiful evening to view the opposition of Mars on 29th September. The group are hoping to build on that success to attract more members to their events.

Mike Iveson distributed an observing newsletter, which he will produce regularly, highlighting the most prominent features in the night sky. He aims to help new observers by including a monthly series of beginner's notes.

Construction Group

David Barnewell reported that the Flamsteed telescope built by members over the past two years had been a great success. They have tested the telescope at Cudham and are delighted to report that it appears to have been of a higher standard and gives a truer image than its commercial equivalents.

The telescope is the society's asset and is available for member's use. It has already travelled to the Pyrenees, Romney Marsh, Blackheath and Cudham.

He particularly drew member's attention to Martin Male and Eddie Yeadon's sterling work towards achieving the high standard of technical expertise in the construction of the Flamsteed.

The next formidable project is to construct a portable telescope using a 20" mirror donated by the ROG. This mirror was made by an ex member of observatory staff. As it is not an accessioned artefact, the museum has gifted it to the society with the proviso that should the FAS cease to exist in the future the mirror/instrument should be returned to the observatory.

At present an optician is studying the mirror and is due to report back as to the feasibility of its use. If his report on the quality of the mirror is favourable the group will then decide on their next step e.g. silvering etc.

The group is hoping for more participants in this exciting venture and David invited members to give him their names and contact details if they are interested in getting involved.

In response to a question from the floor he replied that the focal ratio of the mirror was 4.5, so it will need to be aligned very accurately, but to the naked eye it appears smooth and unflawed.

In summary David was pleased to report that the year had been most successful and they are looking forward eagerly to their next project.

Financial report:

An audited summary of the Society's financial position was presented to the meeting. An expanded version of actual expenditure and outgoings is available on request from the Friend's office. The Society's financial situation is sound even after buying the Coronado telescope and we should continue to operate well within our budget. There were no questions from the floor.

Election of Committee

The current committee of Eddie Yeadon, Nicki Bearcroft, Linn Potter and David Barnewell had all indicated their willingness to stand again. There were no other nominations and they were re-elected unanimously.

Eddie announced that he was standing down as chairperson and it would be up to the committee at the next meeting to elect a new chairperson as his successor. A vote of thanks to Eddie for his invaluable contribution to the formation and running of the FAS will be moved at our next meeting and will be added as an attachment to these minutes in due course.

Any Other Business.

1. Eddie Yeadon raised the issue of where the Society is going to meet when the Space and Time work starts in the South Building. The meeting discussed the Director's suggestion that we might consider moving our meeting venue long before the projected work starts in about 15 months time. We could then accept those people on our waiting list and start planning for expansion. Members at the meeting were interested in taking this suggestion further.

Various suggestions were made from the floor and it was agreed that:

- a. Nobody liked the idea of having a larger membership who would have to book in advance for meetings that interested them on a first come first serve basis.

- b. We should explore suitable venues in the main museum investigating the Lecture Theatre, the submarine room and the Regatta Café
 - c. As it will be more expensive to meet in the main museum, we shall do careful costings to ensure that increased membership will cover extra expenses.
 - d. Jane Bendall will do a short feasibility report, which she will present to the Committee.
 - e. No decisions will be taken without consultation and full discussions with all FAS members.
2. There is enough money in the kitty to set up a workshop one Saturday afternoon. The committee invited member's suggestions as to content and subject.
 3. Jane reminded those members who have not yet rejoined the society to send their forms and payment to the Friends office.
- 4. Training at the ROG:** Robert Massey has asked for volunteers to undertake training on the Coronado telescope and also the 28" telescope.
- a. **Coronado telescope:** ideally museum staff would like to offer public viewing once a month on weekend afternoons on a regular basis, which could feature on the museum's programme. Lesley Bound kindly volunteered to collect names and run the rota, liaising regularly with Robert Massey and Graham Dolan.
 - b. **28" telescope:** in this case the staff are planning to offer more public viewing evenings, which are immensely popular and always a sell out. The volunteers would act as assistants to the astronomers and everyone agreed that it is a unique opportunity to use the telescope. Lesley offered to undertake liaison with Robert and to keep a rota of interested members for this project too.
- 4. Transit of Venus:** Eddie appealed for interested members to join him to repeat the historic calculations done by Maskelyne for the 1769 transit. We are hoping to connect with other institutions across the world to replicate observations and he planned to set up a special project group from the FAS.

Of course we shall also need volunteers (from amongst those who have not travelled with the Friends to the Red Sea), to man the telescopes in the ROG courtyard on the morning of the 8th June 2004.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.