

Flamsteed Astronomy Society

Minutes of a Committee Meeting held at the Ashburnham Arms at 7:00 pm on September 14, 2006

Present: Lin Potter (Chair); Eddie Yeadon; Pat Wainwright; Peter Kitcherside; Mike Dryland.
Jonathan Ellenor joined the meeting at 8:00 pm

Apologies for absence: received from Jane Bendall, David Waugh, & Ian McDowell

Matters arising: There were none and Lin Potter signed the minutes of the previous meeting April 27, 2006

Vote of thanks: Eddie Yeadon had announced his intention to stand down from the Committee at the AGM this coming October. The Chair proposed a huge vote of thanks to Eddie, at this his last formal Committee meeting, for his exceptional efforts on behalf of the Flamsteed since its founding in 1999. Eddie was a founder member and has been constantly to the fore in working to establish the mission and character of the Society, give expert guidance on astronomy issues and choice of speakers, and negotiate with the Friends and Museum on our behalf. He will be greatly missed by the Committee and we gave him notice that he may well be co-opted back as soon as his unique talents are required, no doubt in the near future. The vote was heartily endorsed by all present.

Results of the Member Survey: Pat Wainwright had spent considerable time in designing the survey of members' views and analysing the results (attached). The Committee was unanimous in thanking her for this excellent piece of work which has provided the first structured feedback available to us. Substantial discussion followed. Conclusions in summary –

Overall balance of programme: Noted an appetite for planetarium sessions, and observing at the ROG (and on Blackheath – see below) that we should pursue. Overnight visits, pub nights, the Xmas party, and the Book Mart are minority interests and we will schedule accordingly. Noted that the total number of meetings is 'about right' (38/43).

Subjects for evening meetings: Preference for the topics surveyed was pretty evenly spread. There was a small expression of highest overall preference for 'new research, missions & discoveries' and 'cosmology' (although we felt somewhat 'cosmology'd-out' for the time being!) On the other hand, 'photography & imaging' and 'extra-terrestrial life' showed less support although there was little separation between highest and lowest supported topics. Noted that the level of subject matter was 'about right' (36/41)

Outside visits: Preferences reflected support for day-trips with ROG galleries, Mill Hill, Jodrell Bank, and IoA Cambridge attracting most support. Longer trips (eg Birr Castle, Edinburgh, and Woolthorpe Manor) attracted least support and confirmed our experience that such trips usually get 12-20 ish participants.

Observing: Noted strong support for observing from the ROG and Blackheath, and an overall interest in the Moon and planets. We will plan accordingly, subject to the co-operation of the Moon, planets, and weather! Cudham, Headcorn, and Ashdown Forest received significant minority support and we will continue to plan sessions there. Noted that only 3 of 41 respondents rated themselves as 'able to instruct others'. It was concluded that members are very modest. 21 respondents have their own equipment and 17 can offer lifts. 6 require lifts.

Information & Communication: Most respondents (35/41) prefer to receive e-mails, although 5 still want snail-mail. Most (34/39) thought the number of communications received from the Society is 'about right'. 27/34 use the website – 16/29 access the website at least once a week. Most (28/30) rated the website 'good' or 'excellent'. Most used sections of the website are the Home page, Programme listing, Reports from Meetings & Events, & Observing News. There was enough support for Astronomy News (used by 21/30) to encourage Mike to continue to keep it up to date. 'Equipment & books for sale' and 'Committee Corner' (surprise) are least used.

Actions agreed from the survey review:

- We should again pursue a **Telescope Workshop** to be held in the NMM Quarter Deck or Upper Deck. Pat Wainwright will investigate our options including available dates, leaders (Tony Sizer?, John Griffiths?), theme (Beginners v. Experienced). Pat will seek Jane's help on available dates etc.
- We will make maximum use of opportunities for **observing sessions on Blackheath and at the ROG** (28-inch and other equipment). Pat will plan the sessions and speak to someone about getting better weather.
- The Committee felt that **Jodrell Bank** was the best choice to investigate for an **overnight trip** in June/July 2007. (It might be possible in a long day trip : this should be looked-at). For an overnight location, Manchester was not favoured and we should look at a smaller town near-by like Chester. Jane to be asked to lead the planning.
- Xmas Party – see below.

Charity donation: Jonathan Ellenor joined the meeting and the Committee was able to thank him most gratefully for nominating the Society as beneficiary of his regular work-related charity contribution. It is to be hoped that his example will encourage other members to use their regular giving in the same way. Jonathan is considering standing for election to the Committee at the October AGM.

Planning for the AGM and Eclipse Evening:

Preparations for the AGM are complete unless the election for Committee members is contested. If so, we will resolve the issue at the AGM probably via co-opting, rather than electing, some Committee members. Ian McDowell does not intend to stand. Peter will speak to him about his present feelings.

The Committee reviewed the draft accounts. Pat pointed out two small discrepancies between the summary and the back-up (one later resolved). Jane will be asked to check with the Friends Office.

Lin will speak to Jane about intentions to display members' photographs as part of Francisco's presentation. We were unsure whether this would be better done on a pin board or as part of Francisco's Powerpoint slides.

The Committee noted that the surplus is growing and that Jane has asked Robert Massey and Emily Winterburn for suggestions about worthwhile donations to the ROG. There was a feeling that there should be more time for discussion with the new Committee after the AGM, given some continuing discomfort with what are still seen as high subscription rates.

Planning for the Xmas Party:

Agreed that there will be no choir performance this year. Many thanks to Lin and the choir 'Soulful Voices' for their excellent performances at past Xmas parties.

Agreed that we will combine the party with the Book Mart this year. Mike volunteered to arrange the Book Mart again. It will be run from 6:30 pm and then in parallel with the party.

Jonathan Ellenor volunteered to arrange a quiz for the party this year. Offer gratefully accepted.

Jane has been pursuing the vexing subject of applicable Health & Safety procedures for catering at the party and proposes a sub-committee to review these with the Friends. Pat, Peter, and Eddie volunteered to join Jane's sub-committee.

We should look into including an 'intellectual element' in the party – maybe a planetarium session, or short talk. Pat suggested the astronomical basis for the Star of Bethlehem as a suitable subject for a short talk, and offered to find a possible speaker's name.

Planning for the 2007 Star Lecture: Jocelyn Bell-Burnell, Simon Singh, and Carl Murray were suggested as possible speakers.

Recruitment: Noted that our campaign to recruit from the ROG GCSE classes had been moderately successful. We now wait to see how the renewals of membership go this year.

Any other business: Lin noted that adult education events at the Museum would be good publicity opportunities. Mike reported that Jane and he had met with Helen Whiteoak from the Museum. Helen is willing to give us space for a poster board and handout-leaflets at future events and Mike will pursue this. In return we will publicise Museum education events.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.