

## **Minutes of the Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the National Maritime Museum's Astronomy Society (The Flamsteed Astronomy Society)**

Held in the Lecture Theatre of the National Maritime Museum at 6.45 p.m. on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2004

**Present:** The Chairperson and 37 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society

**Apologies:** Jane and Martin Male, Norman Ellis, Clare and John Kirkbride, Lesley Bound and Mike Iveson.

### **Matters Arising:**

The minutes of the fourth Annual General Meeting of the FAS, held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2003, were taken as read and approved by Linn Potter and seconded by Eddie Yeadon.

### **Chairperson's report by Linn Potter**

The Flamsteed Astronomy Society has completed its fifth year of existence and what an incredible year it has been. We began the year with a wonderfully unprecedented offer from Roy Clare, Director of the NMM, who was our guest at the last AGM, offering help and financial back-up if we were prepared to move our venue from the Discovery Room to this lecture theatre. (The Society had to find a new "temporary" home because of the major renovation and construction works on the ROG site; part of the New Time and Space Development Project, which will bring the observatory into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century).

After some discussion and debate, we agreed to accept Roy's generous offer and here we are. I'm sure we all agree that the lecture theatre and its surroundings offer much better facilities and fantastic "Creature Comforts". It has enabled us to increase our membership with effect from this 2004/2005 season. It has allowed us to become more involved with the Staff at the ROG. in a voluntary capacity. We have become involved also with various public events, including the Transit of Venus and spectacular solar viewing using the Coronado Hydrogen-Alpha. Telescope. I know several Society Members serve regularly as volunteer tour guides. Indeed, I believe we are no longer a peripheral society but an important part of the ROG and I believe a real asset. In fact as far as astronomy societies go we are unique.

We have had a very successful season of lectures, beginning in November with Dr. Ian Crawford on The Original Geological Evolution of the Moon.

We had our annual Christmas Party with the usual fun and festivities in the beautiful Octagon Room, with a talk by the freelance writer Oliver Morton on Mapping Mars – Science, Imagination and the Birth of the World. This is also the title of his first book. David Redfern a FAS member also gave a fascinating talk entitled 'Is Io a Pizza?'

Dr. Michael Dworetzky began the New Year Programme with a lecture on 'Peculiar Stars' whilst in February 'Black Holes' was the subject of a talk given by Professor Malcolm MacCallum. In March Gilbert Satterthwaite marked a very significant 50th Anniversary with a talk on the Airy Transit Circle. Gilbert was the Greenwich Astronomer who made the last official observations with the instrument 50 years ago.

In March David Sellers delivered our star lecture for members and their guests on the Transit of Venus – the Quest to find the True Distance of the Sun. It was an enthralling and passionate presentation.

For the very first meeting in April at our new venue, Dr. Francisco Diego gave a talk on ‘The Ultimate Time Line’ to a packed house.

Part of the Society’s recent development has been for members to give short talks on their interests and experiences connected with astronomy. Francisco shared the floor with Jane Bendall who had the honour of being the first FAS speaker at our new meeting place. Jane gave an excellent talk about her visit to Grahamstown S.A. to see the oldest Victorian Camera Obscura in the Southern Hemisphere. (Using the laser-pointer, she dazzled us with her Darth Vader impersonations!).

Apart from the observing group sessions, there were visits by FAS to Herstmonceux Science Centre in March, and the Herschel Museum in Bath in May. At Hestmonceux we had hoped to view the stars using the various preserved telescopes but the weather was of an Arctic nature – so we ended up with an excellent lecture (in a tent!) given by Anthony Wilson, about the Astronomers Royal and history and the work of the RGO. We also had a tour of the telescopes and met some new friends from Tenterden Astronomy Society.

The Herschel Museum was a delight, and to quote Mike Dryland “If Sir William Herschel is not the patron saint of amateur astronomers, he should be!!” We also had a great picnic in July including a competitive Treasure Hunt of an Astronomical Nature – devised by Mike.

The significant astronomical event of the year was the Transit of Venus on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Transits are rare and no living person had witnessed a transit. The last one was 1822. We were fortunate to have continuous sunshine for the entire six hours. FAS members provided assistance to the professional astronomers of the ROG, helping to operate several telescopes, and enabling the visiting public to observe this rare event. One of the most popular telescopes was the Coronado H-Alpha instrument donated by FAS to ROG.

Adam Hart-Davis interviewed ROG’s Dr. Robert Massey and Eddie Yeadon for the BBC’s ‘Stardate’ programme. There were 6,000 visitors on the day! Lots of hard work but thanks to all involved.

This fact leads nicely onto the Friends’ magazine ‘Horizons’ for which some members have written articles. Eddie Yeadon wrote on the Transit of Venus, and Ralph Taylor and Michael Bradley’s article in the autumn issue was on the ROG Transit event itself.

Committee members have all received notes from Roy Clare praising the FAS. It’s nice to see we are all working together. We too have enjoyed working with the Staff at the NMM. They are always helpful and friendly and we look forward to future developments.

During the year there was a considerable change and improvement in the presentation of the FAS observing newsletter and website. The FAS now has an e-newsletter on [www.flamsteed.info](http://www.flamsteed.info). I personally enjoy reading it very much. It includes astronomy news, reports, pictures and details of observing groups. Thanks in particular to Mike Dryland, David Waugh and Mike Iveson who keep the site regularly updated.

Committee members, Jane Bendall, Eddie Yeadon, Nicki Bearcroft, David Barnewell and co-opted member Mike Dryland – have all worked exceptionally hard this year – thanks.

Many observing evenings were arranged to use the 28-inch refractor but due to inclement weather – no viewings occurred.

In addition – The Observing Group have been extremely enthusiastic and active, busily organising dates and events.

So too has Lesley Bound with the Solar Viewing Project. Lesley has done an excellent job furthering this project and has managed to arrange for Robert Massey to train a significant pool of volunteers. Solar viewing occurs on the first weekend of every month. Thanks to Eddie for an excellent and comprehensive instruction manual.

We have had an extra lecture on art and astronomy, our first of the new Season, by Sarah Tombs in September. It was a very visual and stimulating talk, and members on the Canvas Club joined us for the evening. For further 2004/5 events see the website or Horizons.

Latest developments have included a review of the Constitution by a sub-committee of FAS. At its inception, nobody had any idea of how the Society was really going to develop. Now we know that we are going from strength to strength. We are looking at the Constitution, which will be tabled in a future meeting. We believe that the number of committee members should be increased to enable successful future growth.

Thanks to you all for your continued support – long may we flourish. A particularly big thanks to Jane for all her hard work in organising the Society.

### **Report from the Observing Group**

David Waugh reported that everyone automatically becomes a member of the group when they join the FAS. The group meet regularly each month and of course are particularly active when there are special astronomical events to observe. They do not use the museum's facilities, bringing their own telescopes to the chosen sites, which may be dark field sites in Cudham in Kent and more frequently, on Blackheath. One particularly successful outing had taken place where about ten members had seen the Perseid meteor shower last August in Kent. In the past year there had been approximately seven successful meetings when the weather had been good enough to facilitate viewing. The next get-together is on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October, starting the evening in the Hare and Billet pub in Blackheath from 7.30 p.m. onwards, to discuss the viewing programme for this winter. Everyone is invited. If the weather is clear a telescope viewing on Blackheath will follow this.

Jane and Martin Male had also kindly made the well-equipped observatory in their garden available to members again last year and had generously hosted two or three very successful observing evenings when the skies were clear.

### **Report from the Coronado Group**

Mike Dryland delivered the report in the absence of Lesley Bound who is still convalescent from her recent operation. To-date sixteen people have been trained in the use of the Coronado telescope thanks to Robert Massey and Tony Sizer of the ROG.

Until now the Society has been running sessions on the first Saturday and Sunday of each month and this has proved immensely popular with the public -. On Saturday 4th September between 250 and 300 people looked through the Coronado.

Various technical difficulties have been addressed recently. Tony Sizer has fitted the new motor drive and, at Eddie Yeadon's suggestion, back up batteries are now kept with the telescope. Right ascension and declination jacks are now clearly labelled. Eddie Yeadon has updated his excellent manual to include these improvements and after discussion with Robert Massey and Janet Small, a better system of storage and access has been arranged. Sadly this will have to be changed again when building work starts and Janet's office is moved.

Visitor services will provide us with a click counter to make a more accurate record of the number of members of the public who are participating, and volunteers are requested to remember to fill in the log at the back of the manual at the end of each session.

Lesley is keen to discuss increasing the service we offer and has suggested that all the volunteers and would-be volunteers should meet in the Friends room to discuss future developments. She will arrange this shortly. Lesley also wished to remind everyone that it is possible to arrange more training sessions in a month or two if new members wish to volunteer to join this very rewarding and worthwhile programme.

Mike closed by proposing a vote of thanks to Lesley for her hard work in developing and running the Coronado programme and everyone at the meeting wished her a speedy recovery and looked forward to her return to the FAS.

**Election of Committee Members:** No new nominations for the committee had been received and as the current committee had indicated their willingness to stand again an election was deemed unnecessary. The meeting approved this decision by a show of hands.

**Financial report:** A summary of the audited financial position of the Society for the financial year 2003/2004 was distributed. Jane Bendall reported that although she had calculated a projected underspend of £26 in fact we had a surplus of £839.75 at the end of the financial year. This was because, unlike many of the other groups in the museum, we have not been charged for the use of the site, stewards, security or technician support. As a society we are in an extremely privileged position.

Similarly many of our distinguished lecturers had waived their fees and had just asked for expenses.

As the Society is already aware, it had been agreed with the Friends, that we would pay 20 percent to them as a charity donation as an alternative to paying VAT. It has also been agreed that our surplus reserves would be used to buy equipment or fund projects for the ROG. This will only be done when our reserves are in a healthy position and with the agreement of the Committee, who will consult and inform the members at all times.

A more detailed break down of expenditure is available to members from Jane Bendall and also the Friends office.

### **Any Other Business**

- a) **Date of Christmas Party:** A member had pointed out that the FAS' Christmas party was to be held on the same day as the Friends' Christmas party. We have been fortunate enough to secure a booking for the previous night and by a show of hands it was agreed to change our date to enable members to attend both events. Therefore the FAS Christmas Party will now be on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December in the Octagon Room of the ROG.
- b) In response to a request from the Friends and the Corporate Events team, and to ease the pressure on the Bookings Unit, the Committee have agreed to abandon our custom of meeting on alternate Mondays and Tuesdays. Therefore from next season we will try to standardise and hold FAS meetings on the first Monday of every month. This is dependent on our lecturers' availability, so we must be prepared to remain flexible if necessary.
- c) Mike Dryland reminded everyone that there would be a Bookmart on December 6<sup>th</sup> so start sorting books out now. All proceeds will go back to the selling members. It is not an FAS fundraiser.
- d) He also asked for any photographs available of the Namibia Hoba West Meteorite, which would be passed on to Andrew Georgiou
- e) Mike Dryland provided copies of the excellent newsletter he produces for the Society for those members who do not have access to the Internet. He asked everyone for contributions for the newsletter please.

There being no other business, the Chairperson closed the meeting with thanks to all FAS members who have by their enthusiastic input made the 2003/2004 season so successful.