

Flamsteed Astronomy Society

Notes from a Committee Meeting of the FAS on Wednesday 17th March at 7.15 p.m. in the Ashburnham Arms

Present: Linn Potter (Chair), Nicki Bearcroft, Eddie Yeadon, Mike Dryland and Jane Bendall

Apologies: David Barnewell

The Committee welcomed Mike Dryland who will serve as a co-opted member until the AGM at the beginning of October

1. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising and Linn Potter approved the minutes of 14th Jan 2004

2. Report from the Observing Group.

Nicki reported that the Observing Group were very enthusiastic and active and it was bitterly disappointing that the weather had been so dreadful and many of their planned activities had been cancelled. She encouraged some spontaneity if evenings were clear and offered opportunities for viewing and suggested that there may be easy ways of communicating, for example by group text, as well as email and telephone, details of an imminent event.

The following points were noted in reply to Mike Iveson's memo:

Planetarium: The Committee agreed that "seasonal" talks in the planetarium were an excellent idea. Jane would look into this.

28" Telescope: The Committee will keep trying to arrange viewing through the 28" telescope but Jane pointed out, as an extremely valuable museum artefact, the instrument will never be available to members without the presence of the appropriate museum curator and gallery assistant. The offer from ROG to make use of time after the finish of the scheduled Evening with the Stars seemed an excellent way forward.

Ad hoc, spontaneous viewing would be very hard to arrange but we will try to make more evenings available. When John Griffith comes on board there will be a bigger pool of skilled staff to call upon.

Use of museum telescopes: Jane confirmed that, as long as items were not accessioned, telescopes would be available for group members to borrow. She suggested that someone from the Observing Group be nominated as the main contact to liaise with Janet Small to discuss details. ROG staff asked that items be collected, signed for and returned during working hours, although there didn't appear to be a limit on the time that items were booked out for.

Items for the programme were currently under consideration and the ideas of the Observing Group were welcomed.

Bearing in mind the probable growth of the Society and the limitations of seating in the Planetarium, it was felt that less formal evenings could consist of a combination of a planetarium talk, viewing if the skies were clear and/or some time to spend socialising with other members in the Society.

It was also agreed that the programme should include sessions on observing tips/techniques, the use of digital photography and technology, and any other subjects suggested, if there were sufficient numbers of enthusiasts and participants.

Greenwich Park: It was agreed that the logistics of organising NMM security/park police etc, particularly when the weather dictated very short notice changes to plans, made the Park an unsuitable area for observing outside regular hours. Additionally, the Park does not provide a secure area for telescopes, equipment or Society Members.

For these reasons, the Committee did not feel that it was appropriate to extend the timings for regular meetings or encourage viewing evenings outside regular Park hours. Additionally, the benefits of involving any passers-by would not be realised if sessions were less public.

Publicising the Activities of the Observing Group: The Committee felt that it would be a good idea for existing Society members to get to know new members at meetings in order to make them feel welcome and to learn their views rather than simply ask them to complete a form on joining, particularly when many won't know what activities the Society encourages and when so many people don't complete forms anyway! The monthly meetings provide a wonderful opportunity for the Observing Group to promote their plans and ideas and members may do so at any session.

If the Observing Group went to Blackheath after lectures, this could provide excellent opportunities for encouraging the audience to be involved in stargazing without complicated weather-permitting plans and the logistics of contacting everyone. Any members with suitable equipment can always bring it along to meetings and if the skies are clear the occasion simply becomes more spontaneous. For more structured occasions it was suggested that the group might wish to find a convenient dark field site in Kent, with a handy local pub for regular meetings.

Support for the Group: The Committee was unanimous in their support of the work of the Observing Group and agreed that they be invited to nominate one of their number to join the Committee. This would give them a much stronger voice and would also strengthen the Committee. It was vital that sub-committees were well represented and supported.

3. Report from the Telescope Making Group

There appears to be no activity at present. Eddie reminded the committee that it had been decided that the mirror was in a poor state and it was not worth spending money having it re-silvered. David Barnewell had hoped to find a skilled amateur to undertake re-silvering and conservation. The committee agreed that they needed to know what was happening, if the mirror is not useful it should be returned, as per our agreement with the ROG. Gloria Clifton has been told of the situation. Nicki agreed to contact David to find out the state of play. Jane had already offered funds to cover the cost of transporting the mirror to and from the assessor in Scarborough.

4. Coronado Telescope Training.

Lesley Bound has done an excellent job furthering the project and has managed to arrange for Robert Massey to train a significant pool of volunteers. The ROG had requested that we commit to two sessions of public solar viewing every weekend but the Committee agreed with Lesley that this was far too much to organise for the time being at least. Jane has spoken to Robert Massey and Graham Dolan and it was agreed that the NMM programme should only promise solar viewing on the first weekend of each month. Saying that, if two or more trained volunteers wish to run a public viewing session at any time during open hours, they are welcome to come to the ROG and set up the telescope.

Eddie has prepared an excellent and comprehensive instruction manual with illustrations, which was tabled at the meeting. The committee enthusiastically welcomed the manual and extended their thanks to Eddie. It will be kept with the Coronado telescope from now on. There's a section at the back of the manual for users comments.

Jane has agreed a system of access with Visitor Services. Instructions will be given to all the volunteers as they become trained, so even if the session is impromptu and not on the official NMM programme FAS members will be able to set up the telescope. Visitor Services will also arrange for a notice, which can be put in the courtyard to let the public know what is going on.

The committee agreed that all FAS members wishing to use the Coronado must be trained by ROG staff to comply with stringent public liability requirements and NMM health and safety regulations.

5. FAS Website

The Committee wholeheartedly supported Mike Dryland, David Waugh and Mike Iveson's efforts in the production and development of the website. Mike Dryland outlined the development of the site to date and the ideas for its continued growth in the future. Mike will talk to Jim O'Donnell at the Museum about options for the NMM to host the Flamsteed website which it was hoped would be more accessible for updates in future. At present Mike is the only person who can update the site and he wishes to set up a system whereby other 'authorised' members could update it and everyone could access it with use of a password to post notices and perhaps use it as a chat room. Minor concerns regarding copyright, confirming to ROG standards etc were all noted and Mike will talk to Jim to try and ensure conformity in the future.

Committee support was minuted and there was great enthusiasm for the future of the website. It is intended that material posted on the site could be printed periodically in the form of a newsletter. Members who did not have access to a computer would be sent the newsletter through the post and hard copies could be circulated at each of the Flamsteed meetings. Committee minutes will be posted onto the website.

Eddie to send Mike the FAS' electronic logo to incorporate into the page banner headings.

6. Transit of Venus Arrangements

A TV company called Screenhouse Productions wish to film an amateur astronomy group on the morning of the 8th June as part of a proposal to make four astronomical programmes a year for the Open University. We are still waiting to hear if they have secured a commission from the BBC.

Eddie will contact Robert and Graham to remind them that he has asked for the number of telescopes available during the transit so he can arrange a rota of those FAS members who had volunteered to help. FAS Members will be needed to man the telescopes, as observatory staff will be busy with the media that morning. He has also asked if the ROG needs more solar filters for any of the telescopes because it could be a very good project for us to fund. Each filter costs about £100. It was noted that the 28" has no solar viewing filter: a good subject for a FAS donation in the future?

7. Visit to Herschel Museum

Jane will circulate details after the star lecture is over. She proposed to encourage members to buy their own Apex train tickets.

8. Forthcoming events

9. Programme for next Season

Star lecture: in hand. All committee members had agreed their roles. Eddie plus two guides from the Cutty Sark will undertake the tour of Cook artefacts after the lecture. The Cutty Sark guides have asked for a £35 fee which they intend to donate to charity.

Move to the Lecture Theatre: Security notice: Eddie reminded the meeting that as part of the package agreed when we discussed the move to the Lecture Theatre, Polly had promised that the Stanhope Gate would be open for pedestrians coming from Greenwich Town Centre. Security had refused to open more than one gate. Jane to speak to Visitor Services to see if they can help. She will notify the members accordingly.

Mike mentioned the importance of keeping our link with the ROG. We had already stated our aim of returning to the ROG as soon as possible (see previous minutes), and had thought of aspects of our programme which could be run from the Observatory e.g. Christmas Party in Octagon Room, tours of Observatory Galleries, Viewing evenings etc. Ideas are very welcome.

Picnic during the summer: Following the success of last summer's event. Linn volunteered to arrange another picnic.

Visitor from Cape Town. Ian Glass the expert on Grubb telescopes has not yet replied to Jane's invitation to lecture to the FAS in July.

Paris Observatory: Apparently has been in touch with David Barnewell, no more details available, Jane will follow up again.

Art and Astronomical Phenomena: Eddie has been in touch and arranged a date with Sarah Tombs for 13th September. This would be the first meeting of the new 2004/5 season. As already agreed with the Friends, we are running the event like the star lecture, issuing tickets to members and their guests and offering unallocated tickets to the Friends to sell. We are also going to extend an invitation to the Canvas Club. The lecture theatre has been booked.

Rosemary Selmes: highly recommended as an excellent speaker by Martin Frey of the Tenterden Astronomical Society. She lives in Eastbourne and as late night travel is difficult we might invite her to come on a Saturday afternoon or else offer her a hotel for the night. Jane to contact and explore possibilities.

10. **Members Participation in the Society e.g. Horizons, short talks etc**

The committee is most anxious to encourage contributions from non-committee members both for Horizons and for short talks before lectures start.

Notice from Polly is always short and urgent so Eddie has written two articles. One about the Coronado telescope illustrated with pictures of the presentation to Roy Clare. The other is a trailer for the Transit of Venus.

We agreed to ask David Redfern if he would contribute an article in the future.

We thought that contributors to the web newsletter might like to expand their contributions to about 300 words as an article for Horizons.

Jane (reluctantly) agreed to speak briefly about the Grahamstown camera obscura at the April meeting to encourage other non-scientific members to come forward. Mike suggested it would be interesting to have a short talk about the construction of the Flamsteed telescope.

11. **Any Other Business**

Mike asked if we could have name badges. This was visited a couple of years ago without success but now that the Friends have produced very useable badges for the Coronado volunteers it was

agreed that we ask the Friends office again if they could provide badges for every member. Eddie to peruse.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 28th April at 7.15 in the Ashburnham Arms (to finalize programme for next season)