

FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY

Minutes from a meeting held on Monday 1st November at 7.15 p.m. in the Ashburnham Arms pub

Present: Linn Potter (Chair), Nicki Bearcroft, Eddie Yeadon, Mike Dryland, Pat Wainwright (representing the Observing Group) and Jane Bendall

Apologies: David Barnewell

Election of Chairperson: Linn Potter has agreed to stand again this year as Chairperson, there were no other nominations and Linn was re-elected unanimously by the committee.

The minutes were approved and signed off by Linn Potter

Matters arising: There were no matters arising.

Amendments to constitution:

The Friends Association, at the inception of FAS drew up our current constitution five years ago. At that time nobody knew whether the society would be popular, whether it would be viable and whether it would grow. The society has in fact gone from strength to strength and the committee felt that the constitution should be changed to reflect the new situation, especially since the move to the Lecture Theatre in the main museum, which has led to a significant increase in membership. Eddie and Nicki, who were part of the working group set up to suggest amendments, tabled their suggestions. After discussion the committee, who thanked Eddie and Nicki for their skilful work and their clarity of vision, accepted these amendments.

The next step is for the working group to present the constitution to Polly Larner and discuss our proposals with her. Hopefully that should go smoothly, as in principle Polly has agreed that the constitution needs updating. Finally the agreed constitution will be tabled at the next convenient FAS meeting to enable the members to see the changes.

Observing group

Pat Wainwright has kindly agreed to represent the observing group on the committee on an informal basis for the time being. She pointed out that the group is not a formal organisation, being of course open to all FAS members and that there is no official spokesperson. Some time ago the committee had drawn up guidelines for any groups that wished to operate within the umbrella of the FAS with the then observing group representative, Stephen Wakeford. Eddie promised to forward these guidelines to Pat for the interest of the regular observers. The group is not a separate organisation; it is part, albeit a very important part, of the activities of the whole Society.

The main problem is the lack of a suitable dark field site within easy reach of SE London. One site had been suggested but there were some concerns about safety, especially on very dark evenings. Several of the astronomers connected with the

ROG have made suggestions about contacting other astronomy societies and using their sites, which David Waugh is following up. John Griffiths is chasing up suitable cricket and sports fields near the A20, but nothing readily springs to mind. In the meantime it was suggested that we continue to use Cudham as the best alternative. Linn pointed out that as the museum indemnifies our activities we must choose dark sites bearing in mind the health and safety of members. The committee must be sure that any new site chosen would be acceptable to the Friends and the NMM and their public liability insurance.

The Males had yet again very kindly offered members use of their Romney observatory and Ian has circulated the dates to everyone.

Pat is going to speak briefly about the plans for viewing evenings and also to appeal to members to help with the search for a dark field site at the next FAS meeting. It has already been agreed that somebody should speak about the activities of the viewing group at each FAS meeting from now on. Linn stressed how important the group was to the society as a whole and that the committee is eager to offer help and encouragement to everyone involved.

AGM

The Committee felt the evening had gone well and the speaker was excellent.

Programming

Jane has tabled the necessary changes to the programme, which has been circulated to all members. She apologised for the booking mix up, which led to the postponement of the telescope workshop – the system has changed and now each booking has a unique number – Jane had been using the general FAS number. That said, the Bookings Unit at the museum had accepted a double booking. We hope that Francisco will do the workshop on 15th January, but if he is not available we will ask one of the other ROG astronomers to fill in.

Bookmart

Mike tabled his proposals for running the bookmart on 6th December. He will need help from us all. He particularly needs one person on the Registration Desk to log the books in. Mike has agreed to deal with the finances himself. The object was not to raise funds for the FAS, rather it is an opportunity for members to buy and sell books at reasonable prices. The sale would be held under the propeller and the refreshments would be served in the lobby of the lecture theatre. Mike will circulate members with his proposals asking for feedback to enable us to estimate roughly how many books we might have to deal with.

One member had proposed that we also trade in small astronomical items such as lenses etc. The committee agreed that it would be too complicated to arrange and might be a good idea to follow up at a future date.

As in all new projects it is difficult to gauge the level of interest but we all felt that the idea was a winner and would be the first of perhaps an annual event.

Visits and Outings

Several members had emailed to say that there is an annular eclipse across Spain next year. After discussion it was decided not to arrange a visit but to go for the bigger total eclipse in Turkey in 2006.

We would like to follow up Martin Male's contact at the Paris Observatory and arrange a weekend visit to Paris in 2005. Eddie has already spoken to the Friends about the possibility of a joint visit.

Jane would like to arrange a visit to the Orwell observatory and Playford, particularly after Gilbert Satherthwaite's excellent talk on Airy in May. The Committee agreed and she will go ahead with the arrangements.

Christmas Quiz: Mike had circulated the committee with a suggested formula and some sample questions. He proposed a multiple-choice format. The committee agreed it sounds an excellent idea and promised to give Mike help and suggestions for questions now. Jane is to buy three small prizes.

Any Other Business

Badges: Linn is able to buy plastic name badges at 10 for £2.47 and Eddie will speak to Holly about producing name cards for all the members. It would be nice if they were ready for the Christmas meeting.

Christmas party: Linn is the member of a jazz and gospel group and she suggested that they would be willing to come along and entertain us with a short musical interlude of seasonal songs at the Christmas Party. The committee agreed enthusiastically.

Supernova: Linn recently attended a seminar at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge where she had met Guy Hurst. There has been unprecedented nova and supernova activity in the past few years and he is helping to organise a project whereby amateur astronomers throughout the country volunteer to observe supernova activity and he wondered if any of our members might be interested in getting involved. Linn will contact him and see whether we should arrange a meeting soon or whether next autumn still leaves plenty of time to participate.

Date of Next Meeting: Monday 24th January at 7.15 pm in the Ashburnham Arms

