

11th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FLAMSTEED ASTRONOMY SOCIETY

Held in the Lecture Theatre of the National Maritime Museum on Monday 20th September 2010 at 19.00

1. **Present:** Lin Potter (Chair) Mike Dryland (Vice Chair), Committee Members and 64 members of the Flamsteed Astronomy Society
2. **Apologies:** Apologies were received from Roger Geeson, David Westcott, Malcolm Porter, Janet Chittock and David Waugh
3. **Matters arising:** There were no matters arising from the meeting of 28th September 2009
4. **Chairperson's address**

The Flamsteed Astronomy Society has had another busy and successful year with a huge range of activities. We were very lucky to have Dr Francisco Diego (resplendent in an amazing planetary tie) give the first talk of the season, entitled: 'Aliens! Could Darwin work on the distant worlds of Galileo?' Francisco was a founder member of the Society and the first speaker in those early days. Since then, we have this year increased our membership to the 200 mark. Flamsteed members come from a variety of backgrounds with a wide range of expertise and interests. Jane Bendall was able to present Francisco with his honorary membership only 10 years late.... he was, I am sure, most impressed with our speedy efficiency!

This year we too had a Big Bang! It was our 10th birthday celebrations and we celebrated with much Flamsteed fun and fizz. Dr Robert Massey began the celebrations with a talk about the Moon. This was followed by reminiscences from Jane Bendall, Secretary, and Dr Eddie Yeadon, former Flamsteed Chairman. Dr Kevin Fewster, the NMM Director, presented Jane with the painting 'Io' by one of our members, David Redfern. Jane had admired this painting several years previously when it was hung in a temporary exhibition at the Royal Observatory. Little did she know then that this would adorn her wall several years later! It was indeed a very happy evening and an acknowledgement of all the work that Jane and former Committee members have done to make Flamsteed what it is today!

There were a few hiccups during the year, when members have had to rescue situations at a moments' notice. The meeting on 2nd November was such an occasion. A complicated set of circumstances prevented our scheduled speaker from coming to Greenwich. There was no prior warning and so we were all extremely grateful and relieved when Vice-Chair Mike Dryland produced, as if by magic out of his bag of tricks, a talk with PowerPoint presentation entitled "Working the Line". It was a most interesting and enjoyable talk about the meridian line and since October 2009 was the 125th anniversary of the recognition of Greenwich as the world's prime meridian, it was most fitting. The moral of the story is: always have a little talk up your sleeve! Thanks rained on Mike and I'd like to reiterate this again. Thanks Mike!

Our Christmas lecture had a real festive theme – the Star of Bethlehem. This was another astronomer’s analysis of what it could have been. Professor David Hughes was highly entertaining in his rendition of his theory. After the talk, there was the usual Flamsteed Christmas party with much merriment to start off the festive season.

Our New Year lecture was given by Greg Smye-Rumsby on the subject of “The Universe in 3-D”. This was an excellent presentation. The Flamsteed members donned their 3-D specs and were wowed by the subject matter.

February’s talks were given by two members of staff from the ROG. Dr Rebekah Higgitt, NMM Curator of The History of Science and Technology started off with a talk entitled “Solar Observation at the Royal Observatory Greenwich”. Rebekah opened with a brief description of the ‘Solar Story’ exhibition at the ROG. The exhibition ranged from the very earliest historical observations of the Sun, through work carried out at the Royal Observatory and subsequently by NASA.

Dr Marek Kukula, ROG Public Astronomer, then gave a talk entitled “Solar Story – Understanding the Sun”. The effect of the Sun’s radiation on the Earth’s climate is one of the more controversial aspects of the climate change debate and of interest to many of our members.

Marek also spoke about the Solar Stormwatch project, which is collaboration between ROG, Rutherford Appleton Laboratories, and Galaxy Zoo. This project is bringing solar observation back to Greenwich. Marek went on to further publicise the 2010 Solar Season.

March’s pre-lecture talk was presented by Dr Chris Lintott in an unscheduled visit. He presented a further introduction to the Solar Stormwatch project, much to the delight of Flamsteed members. It was followed by a talk from Dr Stuart Clark, “Do we need a new theory of gravity?” The answer to this question, after much theorising, seems to be a resounding “yes”.

At the end of March, Dr Nick Kanas flew all the way from California to speak about “Mapping the stars from antiquity to today”. Although Nick had been running a project with astronauts and cosmonauts about human interactions in space, his hobby and passion is about mapping the stars. This enthusiasm was very evident in his lecture, and afterwards, he was happy to sign his book, *Star Maps: History, Artistry and Cartography*.

In April, the Flamsteed Astronomy Society received the most devastating news of the sudden death of Dr John Griffiths. John was an enthusiastic Flamsteed member and led popular telescope workshops both for the society and the public. He also taught introductory astronomy courses for adults at the Observatory. He will be sadly missed.

Apart from our own personal Big Bang, we were delighted to welcome Dr Simon Singh, who came to talk to us about his Big Bang! The evening was presented in a most entertaining manner and it was good to see Simon’s sparkle return after the resolution of a recent libel suit brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association.

During the year, there have been many other meetings and events, too numerous to mention individually. There were stargazing sessions on Blackheath, Society meetings at the Hare and Billet pub, visits to Martin and Jane Male’s observatory in Romney and

private visits to Hazelwood; viewing sessions with the 28-inch Great Equatorial at the ROG, public solar viewing at the ROG and telescope workshops.

This year, our relations with the staff of the ROG have continued to be very cordial and friendly, again resulting in a positive experience for all.

The membership department, under the leadership of Rebecca Bristow has flourished. Very sadly, Rebecca has now left us for pastures new.

You will have received our financial end of year figures.

Finally, I would just like to thank everybody for making this Society something to be extremely proud of. Thanks to a dedicated Committee who take an enormous interest in Flamsteed and support it with many hours of voluntary work. Without them, it would simply not exist. Specific thanks must go to Jane Bendall whose tireless efforts provide us with a fabulous programme. Also, Mike Dryland, Vice Chair, deserves special mention for the production of a most informative and well-presented website. It certainly must be the envy of many an astronomy society!

We look forward to the forthcoming year and the new Flamsteed 2010 – 2011 season.

5. Election to the committee

Linda Ransome had decided to step down from the committee owing to work commitments.

One nomination had been received

Grey Lipley was proposed by Mike Dryland and seconded by Pat Wainwright.

As there were no other nominations an election was deemed unnecessary and Grey Lipley was duly appointed as a new committee member.

6. Any Other Business

In response to a member's question it was explained that the accounts and particularly the surplus reserves shown in our end of year financial report do not reflect the real situation. Now we are Members of the museum the money is not Flamsteed AS money at all but part of the Members' overall budget. If we had to fund the use of the venues, the stewarding, security, services of an AV or planetarium technician we would probably only just pay our way.

It is useful to have some sort of accounting to ensure that Flamsteed expenditure is reasonable, also if we wish to fund any items the museum is more likely to listen to our representations favourably, in that our prudence gives us a little moral leverage.

There were no other questions and the Chairperson closed the meeting.