

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Norman Lockyer Observatory Society held on Monday 11 November 2013

Proceedings opened with the Chairman, David Strange, introducing a new more democratic & inclusive style of AGM, due largely to a growing & enthusiastic Society, in particular an excess of candidates standing for the 3 vacant Director positions requiring a ballot. David proceeded to thank Mike Gillard - retiring secretary having been in the post for 14 years, Alan Green, Alan Brittan, Derek Moreton, Brian Ward-Smith, Peter Bradley for repairs to the Spitz Planetarium & ongoing repairs to domes & telescopes, Kate Kay & Kate Nursey for organising another successful Astronomy Fair. Mac Currie, Vic Papai, Iain Grant & Colin Smith who are regular helpers at group bookings. Chris Wood who has PAT tested all the NLO portable appliances.

What with group visits ever-increasing the need for more members to act as hosts was evident. Finally, a gift of a Haynes Astronomy Manual from Plymouth Astronomical Society highlighted the appreciation of our volunteers' work.

The Treasurer, Bill Hitchings, then talked through the accounts, explaining that increased repairs & maintenance expenditure related to the purchase of rare & expensive spare parts for the American-made Planetarium by the new team which has resulted in an extended life-expectancy of another 10 years. All members were reminded of the escalating cost of electricity, obscured by the published figures only covering invoices for the 7 months prior to significant increased charges. We currently spend £300 per month on electricity whilst the air conditioners consume at a rate of ~£10/hour. Solar panels might offer some offset. Peter Youd responded that he had commercial contacts in this area and would investigate.

A member of the Radio Group asked why the Treasurer's report made no reference to weekly subscriptions made by Radio Group members. The Treasurer replied that he was not aware of any such payments. As the issue could not be resolved at the AGM, the Treasurer resolved to refer the matter to the Board at a subsequent Directors' meeting.

The Articles of Association (or constitution) require that 3 Directors step down each year from the Board, although they may stand again for re-election. This year however, there were also 2 vacancies to be filled, due to the resignation of the previous Company Secretary, Mike Gillard & of David Knight. The Directors had concluded however, that the two Officer posts of Treasurer & Company Secretary were essential to the complement of Directors so that such posts would only be specifically advertised when vacant & would be reserved when vacant for specific volunteers for the respective posts. Thus as the current Treasurer was standing for re-election unopposed, & Richard Crisp, recently co-opted to the Board as Company Secretary, was similarly standing for the post unopposed, they were not contenders in the ballot but were accepted as Directors. The Board had also concluded that 11 was a maximum workable number. Therefore there remained 5 contenders for 3 Director places.

Sharon Bellen & Peter Youd acted as tellers for the counting of ballot papers for the election of the 3 Directors. Refreshments were served by Elizabeth, Janice & Derek during the count. Kathleen Dollery, Iain Grant & Derek Moreton each polled more votes than the other contestants & so were duly elected as Directors. The new Board of Directors comprises: Steve Boyce, Allan Brittan, Richard Crisp (Company Secretary), Kathleen Dollery, Iain Grant, Alan Green, Bill Hitchings (Treasurer), Kate Kay, Alan Martin, Derek Moreton, David Strange (Chairman).

There followed a variety of presentations from Interest Group spokesmen highlighting the regular activities of their members on various nights of the week or month. As the many of the audience were monthly 'Monday nighters' these presentations were a good sales-pitch for attracting or at least informing a wider membership.

Kate Kay led the presentations, describing the outline of Friday night activities throughout the year. This involved 45-60 Members under various headings, Astro Scouts, Imagers, Observers & Spectroscopists.

Sandy Moreton gave more detail on the Observers Group, who concentrated on learning the features of the clear night sky, using the planetarium, binoculars & talks. The Observers' Group is ideal for beginners to astronomy including telescope use training.

Kathleen Dollery whilst expressing need for support, gave us ample evidence of why the Junior Section of NLOS is so vibrant – namely her skills & enthusiasm as a teacher. GCSE results were a formal testament to the work done by this Section.

Kate Kay then introduced a stunning series of images prepared by Steve Boyce of the deep-sky Imagers.

Iain Grant gave a condensed insight into the goings-on in the ante-room of the Connaught Dome, now known as the Lockyer Technology Centre (LTC). No longer simple meteor detection, now as part of

UKMON, triangulation of meteor ionisation trails reveals the track & orbits of those detected. Solar flare activity monitoring is also being developed through radio, optical & magnetometer means.

Alan Shuttleworth gave us a quick overview of the mini CubeSats (10cm³) carrying amateur payloads expected to be deployed from the International Space Station (ISS) by the JEM Small Satellite Orbital Deployer (J-SSOD) on November 25, 2013 & which will be monitored by LTC members.

David Lee then talked of the Radio Group's activities including their plans for training new 'hams'.

George Wilkins then told us of the activities of the History Group, with 10-15 members who usually meet during the afternoon of the first Tuesday of each month from October to May. Any new members with a penchant for cataloguing archive materials was eagerly sought.

Alan Brittan then spoke about the upkeep & regular maintenance of the historic telescopes. Records of their duration of usage over recent years reflected the poor weather of 2013.

Kathleen amused the audience by conceding that the old pen & notebook methods had returned to Library book loans for the present, at least until a more workable IT arrangement was implemented.

She reminded us that the Observatory has no free space for new books so any proposed addition should only be accepted by her.

Richard Crisp gave a very brief mention of Meteorological Group events thanking the Society via the Directors for its funding of proposed new equipment to be installed in the Lockyer Technology Centre.

All the above presentations were appreciatively applauded by the membership.

Alan Martin then gave a Director's view of some of the governance issues raised as a result of preparation for this AGM, encouraging members to take a greater interest in how the Society operates including legal structure, Companies Act, role & responsibilities of Directors, how it all applies to members & how improvements are planned for the immediate years ahead.

Alan Green then gave some breaking news on improvements to the Broadband service & encouraged all Members to look out for the deployment of extra fire extinguishers & to take time to be familiar with how to use them. Fire practises were only useful if conducted seriously, with everyone leaving by the nearest or most appropriate fire exit.

Under AOB, a member having made circuitous plea for subscriptions to be Gift Aided, was informed that we did so. Another called for a unified calendar of events.

The meeting was asked about which month was most suitable for the AGM in 2014 & November was approved of. In spite of the obvious bias of some, Monday was not objected to by any of the 70 members present. Finally, the Christmas Party would be held on 9th December 2013.

Comment

The 2013 AGM was surely an undoubted success after concerns that an AGM without a guest speaker would not command a full evening's event. The Donald Barber Lecture Hall was comfortably filled with about 70 members attending (20% of our total membership with 30% of the Membership voting, of which 40% did so by proxy votes & 60% in person. Starting at 7.30pm & only concluding at 9.45pm, attendees were entertained after the ballot by audio-visual presentations by Interest Group members.