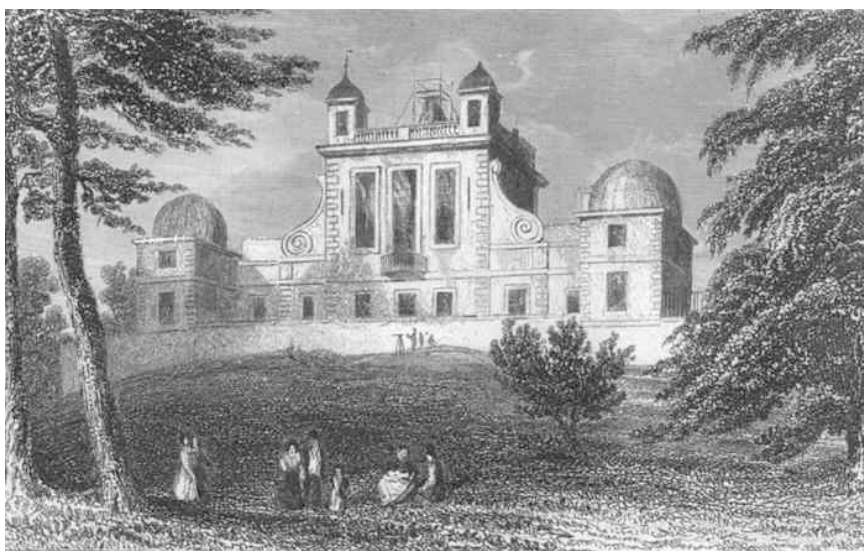




SHA e-NEWS

The SHA's new mode of Internet communication.

PRIME MERIDIAN 125TH ANNIVERSARY IMMINENT



The Old Royal Observatory, Greenwich, mid 19th century

The Greenwich Meridian, based at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, was established by Sir George Airy in 1851.

By 1884, over two-thirds of all ships and tonnage used it as the reference meridian on their maps. Between 1 October - 1 November of that year, at the behest of U.S. President Chester A. Arthur, 41 delegates from 25 nations met in Washington, D.C., USA, for the International Meridian Conference. Noted Cornish astronomer John Couch Adams participated on behalf of the United Kingdom.

By the end of the conference, Greenwich had won the prize of Longitude 0° by a vote of 22 to 1 against (San Domingo), with 2 abstentions (France and Brazil), taking place on 22 October, 1884. French maps continued to use the Paris Meridian for several decades.

There were two main reasons for the choice. The first was the fact that the USA had already chosen Greenwich as the basis for its own national time zone system. The second was that in the late 19th century, 72% of the world's commerce depended on sea charts which used Greenwich as the Prime Meridian. The decision, essentially, was based on the argument that by naming Greenwich as Longitude 0°, it would be advantageous to the largest number of people.

What may have been forgotten by many, however, is that October 2009 is the 125th Anniversary of the making of that decision. Project Gutenberg has made the conference proceeding protocols available online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/17759>

Mooning with the Mark I in '69

The 'Mark I' radio telescope, now known as the Lovell Telescope, was the largest steerable dish radio telescope in the world, 76.2 m (250 ft) in diameter, when it was completed at Jodrell Bank in the summer of 1957.

The telescope became operational just in time for the launch of Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite. It was the only telescope able to track Sputnik's booster rocket by radar, locating it just before midnight on 12 October 1957.

In February 1966, Jodrell Bank tracked the USSR's unmanned moon lander Luna 9 and listened in on its facsimile transmission of photographs from the moon's surface. The photos were published by the British press before the Soviets themselves were able to release their own.

In 1969 the Soviet Union's Luna 15 was also tracked. This was a last minute Soviet attempt to steal some of Apollo 11's thunder. A recording of the dramatic moment in which Jodrell Bank's scientists observed the failed attempt was made public for the first time on 3 July 2009. See: <http://bit.ly/PyzQL>

Stuart Williams, Editor

SW

SHA SURVEY NOTES



Is this a Red Herring?

Following a request I made on a genealogy forum for information on "dead astronomers" I received this photo from a reader in Canada. It purports to show a house in Haddenham, Bucks (not confirmed but the reader says his ancestors lived there for many years). In the garden is a man wearing a bowler standing next to a telescope. The plaque on the house reads WILSON.

It is well known that Rev. William Rutter Dawes lived in Haddenham and once sold a telescope to a man named Wilson. Is this a Dawes telescope? Probably not, as Dawes equipment from Dolland, Merz, Cooke and Clark was on a much grander scale and I believe the Wilson he sold to was perhaps from Rugby school and the instrument was an 8¼-inch Clark refractor. Members are invited to comment; your views would be most welcome.



Meanwhile an interesting photo has appeared at www.geograph.org.uk. It shows a disused Observatory behind Giggleswick School, near to the official observation site for the 1927 eclipse. Was this a school observatory and during what period was it in active use?

Original photograph by Humphrey Bolton, see: <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1445439>

Roger Jones, Survey Coordinator

Email: roger.jones@shastro.org.uk

BOOKS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

In celebration of the International Year of Astronomy in 2009, the Frazier International History Museum in Louisville, Kentucky USA is presenting a mini-exhibition, *Fathers of Astronomy*, featuring authentic, first-edition books written by ground-breaking scientists. In partnership with the University of Louisville Libraries and Jefferson Community & Technical College, the Frazier Museum presents books by Galileo and Copernicus, as well as the "Nuremberg Chronicle," now through January 3, 2010.

Published in 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus' "On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres" is celebrated as the 16th century's most important scientific publication, with only 276 of these books surviving today.

Building on Copernicus' work, Galileo Galilei's "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems," published in 1632, shattered the church-endorsed Aristotelian view of the universe in favour of a heliocentric system.

Also on display and a predecessor to the scientifically-based works of Copernicus and Galileo, the "Nuremberg Chronicle," written by Hartmann Schedel, is an illustrated world history from Creation up to the time of the book's publication in 1493.

See: <http://www.fraziermuseum.org> or call (502) 753-5663 (United States of America).

SW

RAS LIBRARY SATURDAY OPENINGS

Remaining Saturday Openings of the Royal Astronomical Society Library for this year are: 5 September, 3 October, 7 November, 5 December. Opening times 10.00 - 12.30, 13.30 - 17.00.

Anyone wishing to view the RAS Library on these dates should contact the Librarian, Peter Hingley, in advance to let him know

of anything special they need, especially older journals and Reserve Collection books.

Contact Peter Hingley by email: pdh@ras.org.uk or by telephone during office hours: 020 7734 4582 extension 215.

Royal Astronomical Society Library, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BQ. Website: www.ras.org.uk

PDH/SW

Forthcoming: The SHA Autumn Conference 2009 in Birmingham



The Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street.

SATURDAY 31 OCTOBER 2009, 09.30-17.10

As is traditional, this year's SHA Autumn Conference will take place at the Birmingham & Midland Institute in Margaret St, Birmingham.

The date is slightly later than in previous years, Saturday 31 October, and for reasons of economy, the meeting is being held in the Dickens Room, which was the venue for the 2004 Autumn Conference. Coincidentally, two of this year's speakers - Dr. Allan Chapman and Mr. Andrew Lound - also spoke on that previous occasion!

It is expected that admission to this event will cost £10 for members and £12 for non-members, to include afternoon refreshments. Those attending are asked to make their own arrangements with regard to morning refreshments (the cafe will be open) and lunch (there are also many eating establishments and sandwich shops in the city centre). There is no on-site parking but there are a number of city centre car parks and Birmingham New Street and Snow Hill Stations are within a 10 minute walk.

A booking form confirming these details will be issued shortly, please book asap so that the caterers can be given the details for the afternoon refreshments.

The programme for the day is as follows:

- 09.30 to 10.00 REGISTRATION - in
The Dickens Room.
- 10.00 to 10.15 Mr. Gilbert Satterthwaite:
Welcome.
- 10.15 to 11.00 Mr. David Kerrigan: 'A 2,000 -
year - long international astronomy project -
Ptolemy's Star Catalogue'.



The Dickens Room - 2004 Autumn Conference

11.00 to 11.45 Mr. David Sellers: 'In Search of
William Gascoigne (c.1612-1644)'.

12.00 to 13.20 LUNCH BREAK including:
Unveiling of the Ken Goward
Memorial Clock in the Sir
Robert Ball Library.

13.30 to 14.15 Mr. Andrew Lound: 'James
Ferguson's lecture series in Kidderminster 1771.

14.15 to 15.00 Mr. Mike Leggett: 'The Wing
Dynasty'.

15.00 to 15.30 REFRESHMENTS.

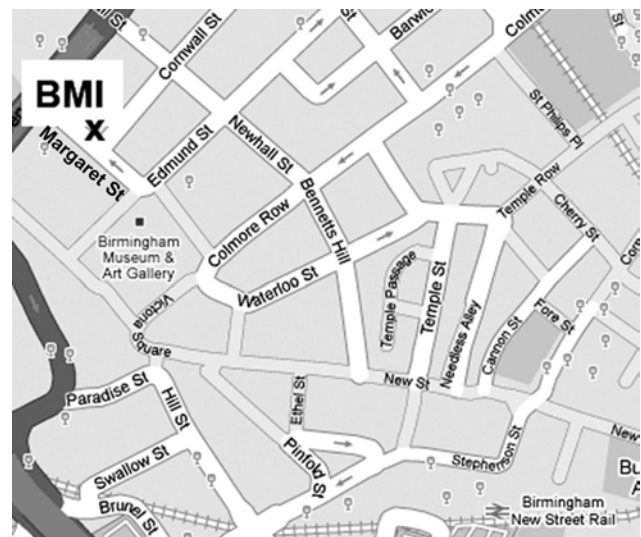
15.30 to 17.00 Dr Allan Chapman: 'Title tba'.

17.00 to 17.10 Mr. Gilbert Satterthwaite:
Conclusions and Dispersal.

Organisers: Kevin Kilburn, Stuart Williams and
Roger Jones. Email: kkilburn@globalnet.co.uk

BMI website: <http://www.bmi.org.uk>

Birmingham Car Park Map: <http://bit.ly/9T6Pi>



SHA MEETINGS IN 2009

Sat. 31 October: SHA Autumn Conference, Dickens Room, Birmingham & Midland Institute. See page 3. SW

COUNCIL MEETINGS 2009

21 February: Burlington House, London. 13 June: BMI, Birmingham. 12 September: BMI, Birmingham. November: IOA, Cambridge, TBC. SW/CD

OTHER EVENTS IN 2009

Sat. 12 September: Institute of Astronomy Old Cambridge Observatory Building open as part of 'Open Cambridge', 1.00-5.00pm. Telescope tours, historical exhibition, further details see: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/opencambridge/>

Sat. 21 March - Mon. 21 September: 'Portraits of Astronomers', The National Portrait Gallery, 2 St Martin's Place, London, WC2H 0HE. Ten portraits of Astronomers are on show in room 38a. Tel: 020 7306 0055. Open daily 10am-6pm.

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www.shastro.org.uk

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Late night open Thurs and Fri until 9pm.

Wed. 7 October: The Institute of Astronomy, Madingley Road, Cambridge, will begin its season of public talks and observing nights. Each week on Wednesday nights at 7.15pm. More details at: <http://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/public/>

Sat. 10 October: Mark Hurn, SHA Archivist will be giving his talk about the Revd. James Challis and the failed Cambridge hunt for Neptune to an all-day conference organized by Lincoln Astronomical Society, see: <http://www.lincolnastronomy.org>

Thu. 16 July, 13:00 - Sun, November 15, 17:00: 'Bright Stars - Daughters of Urania', Herschel Museum of Astronomy, 19 New King Street, Bath, BA1 2B. An exhibition celebrating the history of women in astronomy. Website: <http://www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk> Opening times weekdays 11 - 5pm (closed Wednesday). Weekends & bank holidays 11 - 5 pm. Entry to exhibition included in admission fee.

Thu. July 23, 2009 12:00 - Sat, January 29, 2011, 18:00: Cosmos and Culture, The Science Museum, London, SW7 2DD. Cosmos & Culture is a major temporary exhibition. It explores how people of many different cultures have studied the cosmos and how this has shaped our perceptions of the Universe - and of ourselves. The displays will trace the development of astronomical technologies, our understanding of the Universe, and the influence of astronomy on our everyday life and popular culture.

Website: <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk> SW

Calendar in Brief 2009

Thurs. 1 January

SHA Subscription Renewals due. Contact Peter Hingley pdh@ras.org.uk

Sat. 28 March

SHA Joint Meeting with RMetS, RAS, Burlington House, London.

Sat. 18 April

SHA David Dewhirst Meeting, IOA, Cambridge.

Mon. 20 - Thur. 23 April

European Week of Astronomy and Space Science, including RAS NAM etc: www.jenam2009.eu

Fri. 8 May

Mars Before the Space Age, RAS, Burlington House, London.

Sat. 4 July

SHA Summer Picnic, Hanwell Community Observatory, Oxfordshire.

Sat. 18 July

SHA AGM & Summer Conference, NMM, Greenwich.

Sat. 31 October

SHA Autumn Conference, BMI.

Regular Contributors

STUART WILLIAMS



e-News Editor
Stuart Williams is also Research Librarian at the SHA's Sir Robert Ball Library in Birmingham.

KEVIN KILBURN



Kevin Kilburn is the Secretary of the SHA and contributes society news.

CLIVE DAVENHALL



Clive Davenhall is Editor of the SHA Bulletin. and contributes timely news.