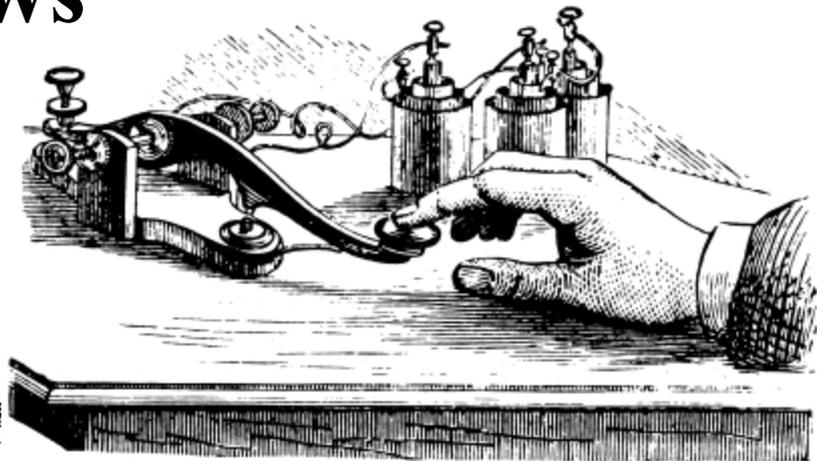


SHA eNews



Society for the History of Astronomy electronic news
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Editor: Clive Davenhall

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SHA news

Editorial: the SHA eNews

You will have noticed that this issue of the *eNews* has a rather different appearance to usual. Stuart Williams, who has edited the *eNews* since its inception, has had to stand down at short notice because of health problems in his immediate family. His elderly mother is increasingly frail. He is, however, continuing as the Society's Treasurer and will continue to manage the list of member's e-mail addresses. With some trepidation I have stepped into the breach as *eNews* Editor; Stuart will not be an easy act to follow. And in the matter of layout I'm not going to try; the *eNews* will now have a much simpler format. It will, however carry the usual details of forthcoming SHA events and will maintain a quarterly schedule. I hope that you will find these arrangements acceptable. Finally, it only remains to thank Stuart for his splendid work with the *eNews* and to wish him and his family well.

Clive Davenhall.

Subscription reminder

If you have not renewed your membership subscription then, under the terms of the Society's Constitution, your membership formally lapsed on 31 March 2010. If you intend to renew then please contact the Membership Secretary, Peter Hingley (details on the back page). An individual membership of the Society costs £25.00 *per annum*. Full membership details are available on the Society's Web site.

Midlands members meeting

A meeting of SHA members living in the Midlands will take place in the Sir Robert Ball Library at the Birmingham & Midland Institute on Saturday 8 May, 12 noon - 4 pm, followed by coffee at the nearby Starbucks.

This meeting, the first such event, will be small and very informal. It simply aims to offer SHA members in the Midlands the chance to get together to chat, socialise and discuss personal projects, history of astronomy *etc.* and the SHA. We hope it will also encourage, and facilitate, use of the Sir Robert Ball Library. There is no charge for the meeting, though members attending will have to buy their own coffee afterwards!

Due to the size of the room we are only aiming to attract a small number of members, so members living in the local counties should have already received an invitation by email. If you would like to attend and have not received an invitation then please contact Stuart Williams (e-mail: a.stuart.williams@gmail.com)

If the response is good, we will consider organising such meetings on a quarterly basis. Members living in other parts of the country might consider doing something similar in their own localities.

For more on the BMI see: <http://www.bmi.org.uk>

Summer events

Two events are planned for the summer. Firstly, and replacing the Summer Conference, is a our first summer outing, which is a return to Oxford for a visit to the Radcliffe Observatory and the Museum of the History of Science on Saturday 3 July 2010. This event is being organised by our latest Council member, Dr Roger Hutchins. The trip to the Museum of the History of Science will be conducted by our Honorary President, Dr Allan Chapman.

The second event is the summer picnic, which will be held at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire on Saturday 17 July 2010. Stonyhurst College is a Jesuit school and several of its masters made notable contributions to astronomy. The College Observatory was an important centre for solar astronomy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

We apologise for these events being so close together. Unfortunately we are constrained firstly by the very limited availability of Dr Chapman and secondly in the case of Stonyhurst by the need to visit in the school holidays.

If you plan to attend either or both of these events you are strongly urged to e-mail the SHA Secretary Kevin Kilburn (contact details at the end of this *eNews*) without delay, so that we can have some idea of numbers.

Visit to the Radcliffe Observatory

The Radcliffe Observatory, working in 1793 and completed by 1794 as Oxford's finest Georgian building, was one of the four leading observatories in Europe until about 1830. Its superb instruments were the final masterpieces of John Bird, and several of them are in Oxford's Museum of the History of Science (MHS). The Observatory is now part of Green Templeton College (GTC). The SHA visit will be hosted by Professor Jeff Burley of GTC, who for years has played the leading role in restoring the Observatory tower and in planning the next stage of the restoration. He will explain the architecture of the remarkable and beautiful buildings. Our Honorary President Dr Allan Chapman will add his account of the Observatory's astronomical work; in the afternoon he will explain the instruments at the MHS. These two guides will provide a wonderful insight into the history and work of one of Britain's most historic and complete observatories.

The draft programme for the day is (we may need to be flexible however):

1045-1100: Meet in Porter's Lodge of GTC on the Woodstock Road, Oxford.

1100: Barclay room: welcome and brief introduction to the buildings by Prof. Jeff Burley.

1115-c1230: Guided tour of grounds and Observatory building; Prof. Burley on the remarkable architecture; Dr Chapman on the astronomy.

c1230: Lunch break (bring your own, or use a pub) depending on weather perhaps on the lawn of GTC, or the Lamb and Flag on nearby St Giles (half-way to the MHS).

1400: Meet at the entrance steps of MHS in Broad Street.

1400-1500: Dr Chapman's guided explanation of the Radcliffe instruments (on three floors).

1500: onward at leisure; view the rest of the MHS or go where you will.

Special Note: Jeff Burley has edited a splendid new book: *A History of the Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford: The Biography of a Building* (2005), published by Green College and profusely illustrated in colour and black and white. It includes a detailed account of the astronomical work of the Observatory. It is available for £14.50 from the Porters' Lodge and all proceeds go to the Restoration Fund. Your purchase and support would be much appreciated, but is not of course obligatory. The Society will make a donation.

Location: Green Templeton College, Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 6HG. For a map and directions see URL: <http://www.gtc.ox.ac.uk/contact-us/how-to-find-us.html>

Parking in Oxford is difficult and expensive. You are strongly urged to use the several park and ride schemes or the cheap and frequent Oxford Tube express omnibus from London (Grosvenor Gardens near Victoria or Marble Arch), or train. There is no parking at GTC.

Access: The beautiful interior of the Radcliffe Tower is accessed by a long staircase. The MHS visit also involves a good number of stairs. Coffee on arrival/sandwich purchase: these are available in Little Clarendon Street where St Giles becomes the Woodstock Road, 200 yards from GTC. Other attractions include: the MHS is open until 5 pm and has numerous astronomical and other exhibits of great interest. The Ashmolean (the University's archaeological and fine arts museum on the corner of Beaumont Street) reopened last November after a £60 million refurbishment and provision of seven new galleries. It is open until 6 pm and is wonderful!

Important note: there is no charge to SHA members for this event. However it is essential that you advise SHA Secretary Kevin Kilburn (contact details at the end of this *eNews*) ASAP if you plan to attend so that we have an accurate idea of numbers in advance.

Summer Picnic

The SHA Summer Picnic for 2010 will be held at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire on Saturday 17 July, starting at 1 pm. The College was founded in 1593 and has a long astronomical tradition. The noted Jesuit astronomer Fr Angelo Secchi did important work on

the colour of stars here *circa* 1848-49 which ultimately lead to the modern understanding of spectral classification.

For nearly a century, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Stonyhurst was an important contributor to meteorological, geomagnetic and solar research in the UK. Its Directors lead British expeditions all over the world to view solar eclipses and the transit of Venus. For the modern solar observer, Stonyhurst is perhaps best known for the Stonyhurst discs used here between *circa* 1881 and *circa* 1938 to estimate the position of sunspots on the solar surface.

Our guide, Dr Fintan O'Reilly, lecturer and Director of Stonyhurst College Astronomical Society, will offer a valuable insight into various aspects of Stonyhurst's astronomical history and will describe the architecturally classical observatory, built in 1838, within the formal, landscaped gardens of the college. The picnic itself will take place beside the Observatory. The site of the long-disused underground magnetic observatory may also be visited. We will end the tour in the observatory housing the recently restored Grubb refractor of 1893 and from where the Stonyhurst solar observations were made.

Stonyhurst College is located in the picturesque countryside of the Ribble valley of central Lancashire, near Clitheroe. Access to the college is easiest from Junction 31 of the M6 and the A59 to Whalley, or via Ribchester and Longridge, thence to Hurst Green.

It is recommended that large scale maps are downloaded from <http://www.streetmap.co.uk/> using the Stonyhurst postcode (BB7 9PZ).

For those wishing to visit another astronomically historical site, Carr House, from where Jeremiah Horrocks first observed the transit of Venus in 1639, return to the M6 and then continue south westwards along the A59 about 10 miles to Much Hoole and Bretherton. Note, however, that Carr House is still a private dwelling.

There is no charge for SHA members but it is suggested that non-members make a voluntary donation to Fintan of £5 per person to cover his valuable time as our host. Please see Kevin Kilburn about this on the day. Pre-booking is not essential but is recommended; please contact Kevin Kilburn (details at the end of this *eNews*)

Location: Stonyhurst College, Hurst Green, Clitheroe. BB7 9PZ. For further details see the College Web site: <http://www.stonyhurst.ac.uk/> and also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonyhurst_College

Autumn Conference

The SHA *Autumn Conference and AGM* will be held on Saturday 30 October. As usual the venue will be the Birmingham & Midlands Institute in central Birmingham. In a change to previous years the meeting will include the AGM. The meeting itself is unthemed. A full programme is planned and details will be included in the next issue of the *eNews*.

Recent meetings

The Society's first meeting of the year, a return visit to the historic Chetham's Library in central Manchester, was held on 20 February. The meeting was very successful, with a variety of interesting talks and numerous rare astronomical items from the Library's historic collection on display. A report will appear in a future issue of the *Bulletin*. In the meantime it only remains to thank the Chetham's staff for their generous hospitality.

The Antiquarian Astronomer

We regret that there are continuing delays in the production of the next issue of the Society's Journal, *The Antiquarian Astronomer*. This is due to the unfortunate fact that both the Editor, Reg Withey, and his father, are in very poor health. Council are now investigating ways of expediting the production of the AA as a matter of urgency and we hope to be able to announce new arrangements shortly. In the meantime we wish Dr Withey and his family well, and thank you for your understanding and forbearance.

The SHA Bulletin

Preparation of the Spring issue of the SHA *Bulletin* is now well advanced. We anticipate this issue being distributed to members in late May or early June. It will be another substantial issue containing all the usual features: meeting reports, articles, letters, reviews and all the regular items. There will be an obituary and appreciation of the Society's much missed founding Treasurer Ken Goward. The meeting reports will include the Society's joint meeting with the Royal Meteorological Society, the RAS Discussion Meeting *Mars Before the Space Age* (both held last spring), and the Society's 2009 *Summer Conference and AGM* held at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. There will be articles on the Isaac Newton Telescope at Herstmonceux and on artist's representations of Mars before the space age.

Your contributions for future issues of the *Bulletin* are always welcome, indeed encouraged...

Book reviewers required

... on which subject we would like to find people to review the following two books, which have recently been purchased for the library, for a future issue of the *Bulletin*.

Staubermann, Klaus, *Astronomers at Work: A Study of the Replicability of Nineteenth Century Astronomical Practice*. Verlag Harri Deutsch, 2007. (*Acta Historica Astronomiae*. 32) . See URL: http://www.amazon.de/Astronomers-work-replicability-astronomical-practice/dp/3817118104/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books-intl-de&qid=1271097879&sr=8-3

Willach, Rolf, *The Long Route to the Invention of the Telescope*. American Philosophical Society, 2008. See http://www.amazon.com/Invention-Telescope-Transactions-American-Philosophical/dp/1606189859/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1271098289&sr=8-1

If you are interested in reviewing either of these items then please contact the Librarian, Madeline Cox (e-mail: library@shastro.org.uk).

Other news

Summer Solstice Meeting (non-SHA event)

The Wrottesley Observatory at the Black Country Museum, Dudley will be holding a *Summer Solstice Event* on Sunday 20 June 2010, the weekend closest to the solstice. The event will run from 10 am to 4 pm. There will be displays, demonstrations and observatory tours during the day. There will also be talks on solar topics: *Solar Observing Through Time* in the morning and *Solar Science Through Time* in the afternoon. In addition there will be opportunities to observe the Sun with both vintage and modern instruments, including Cooke and/or Wray refractors equipped with a Herschel wedge and modern instruments using both white light and H α filters.

You are invited to come along and celebrate the solstice! Further information is available from John Armitage, Observatory House, 117, Hednesford Road, Cannock Staffordshire.

Location: Black Country Living Museum, Tipton Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 4SQ.
See: <http://www.bclm.co.uk/index.htm>

INSAP VII (non-SHA event)

The Seventh INSAP (INSpiration of Astronomical Phenomena) Conference will be held in Bath from Monday 25 October to Friday 29 October 2010. The venue will be the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute. This interdisciplinary conference will explore humanity's fascination with the sky, which has been a strong and sometimes dominant element in human culture. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, from the humanities and sciences, as well as artists, will present and discuss their work on the cultural impact and inspiration of astronomical phenomena, from both a historical and contemporary perspectives. The meeting is sponsored by the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, University of Wales, Lampeter.

The deadline for submitting papers and posters has now passed, but registration for attendance is still open. Further details and registration are available on the conference Web site: <http://www.insapvii.org/index.html>

Note that space is limited and attendance is limited to one hundred participants.

RAS Library Saturday opening

By kind invitation SHA members may use the RAS Library in their premises in Burlington House. In addition to normal weekday opening the Library also opens on the first Saturday of each Month, Bank Holidays excepted. For the remainder of 2010 the Library will be open 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on the following Saturdays:

8 May, 5 June, 3 July, 7 August, 4 September, 2 October, 6 November and 4 December.

There will only be one member of staff on duty so it will be necessary to ring the bell and wait to be admitted; if the delay is excessive please telephone 020-7734 -4582, ext. 215. You are advised to confirm out-of-hours openings with the Librarian, Peter Hingley (details below) before undertaking a lengthy journey.

eNews admin

Next issue

The next issue will be circulated around 1 July 2010.

Contributions for inclusion in this issue should be sent to me by 21 June 2010.

Snippets for the *eNews*, typically notices of forthcoming events, are always welcome. Longer items suitable for the *SHA Bulletin* are also welcome and should be sent to the same address.

Contact details

All correspondence regarding the *eNews* should be sent to:

Clive Davenhall. 30, Millar Crescent, Morningside, Edinburgh, EH10 5HH, UK.
e-mail: newsletter@shasto.org.uk

Membership inquiries should be sent to the Membership Secretary:

Peter Hingley. The Librarian, Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BQ, UK. e-mail: pdh@ras.org.uk

General Communications to the Society should be sent to the Secretary:

Kevin Kilburn FRAS. 158, Low Leighton Road, New Mills, High Peak, Derbyshire, SK22 4JF, UK. e-mail: secretary@ras.org.uk

SHA Web site: <http://www.shastro.org.uk>