



SHA e-News

Society for the History of Astronomy

Volume 7, no.3, July 2015.

Editor: David Sellers

REMARKABLE FIND AT CHETHAM'S LIBRARY

The Manchester Times of 22 Jan 1874 reported the 'Discovery of Curious Astronomical MSS in Chetham's Library'. The author of the manuscripts that had been found was one Samuel Smethurst (1714-1799), of Manchester and Liverpool. The papers, first given to the Library c.1800, were said to be full of expert calculations and diagrams pertaining to planetary motions, eclipses, and proofs of mathematical theorems. And yet, according to the report, Smethurst's "name appears to be unknown amongst astronomers, geometers, and mathematicians."



Geoff examining the manuscripts at Chetham's

This summer another remarkable feature of the manuscripts has been discovered by pulsar astronomer, Geoff Wright, whilst researching a quite different topic. It transpires that they contain voluminous calculations and beautiful diagrams relating to the 1761/69 transits of Venus and also analyses of the circumstances of famous eclipses from Biblical and classical history.

Geoff approached the SHA for help in further research. He and David Sellers (author of a book on the Transit of Venus) hope to produce an account of this interesting find for *The Antiquarian Astronomer*.

SHA COUNCIL APPEAL ANSWERED IN STYLE

report by Roger Hutchins

After the disaster of losing Madeline as Chairman, and with Bob Bower already a double-Secretary, it was clearly essential to recruit fresh blood to the SHA Council. Hence the appeal in the January E-News for any member to attend a Council meeting and the customary lunch beforehand, so as to know Council better, and to sample the issues and way in which business is dealt with. We are delighted that in February **Laura Carroll** volunteered to be co-opted, and to be nominated at the October AGM for the post of General Secretary.

Four more members journeyed to the 6 June Council meeting. We had heard only days beforehand that our Acting Chairman, Kevin Kilburn, was having to stand down. So it is immensely helpful that all four guests liked what they saw, and agreed to be co-opted to Council.

John Chuter wrote "I thoroughly enjoyed the council meeting yesterday. I think I can help out in various ways and I certainly felt that the help would be welcomed and appreciated". **Gerard Gilligan**, a stalwart of Liverpool AS and member of the BAA Historical Section, wrote "...enjoyable Saturday afternoon. Will be glad to help and be more involved ...", and he also agreed to be co-opted without portfolio. **Mike Shaw** whose responsibilities include teaching GCSE Astronomy at Bootham School in York was co-opted and agreed to be nominated in October as Membership Secretary. **Geoff King**, already treasurer of his local astronomical society wrote: "Thank you for the invite to attend today's council meeting which I found very enjoyable and informative. If only all societies' councils could operate in such a constructive and supportive manner". He is willing to be nominated for the SHA Treasurer post in

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FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

2015 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for this year will be held at the Birmingham & Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS, on **Sat. 31 October 2015**, 9.30 - 17.00.

Confirmed speakers include:

Allan Chapman on *Sir John Herschel*

Rebekah Higgitt on *Nevil Maskelyne and the role of Astronomer Royal*

Laura Carroll on *Derbyshire Astronomers* (Madeline Cox's presentation)

Phil Barnard on *The Chance Brothers: their contribution to Astronomy*

Members are encouraged to give presentations, or exhibit posters relating to their research at future SHA events and anyone wishing to do so should contact Kevin Kilburn (kevinkilburn@sky.com) in the first instance.

2016 SPRING CONFERENCE

The 2016 SHA Spring Conference will be held in Bath, on **Sat. 2 April 2016**, jointly with the William Herschel Society, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. The programme includes:

Roger Moses on *100 years of Cosmic Rays*

David Love on *Johannes Kepler*

Francis Ring on *Sir William Herschel*

John Chuter on *Somerset Astronomers*

[TBN] on *The History of Bristol Astronomical Society*

The Conference will include a reception at the Herschel Museum (and maybe a tour of the museum).

2016 SUMMER PICNIC

The venue and date of the 2016 summer picnic are yet to be decided.

2016 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for 2016 will be held at the Birmingham & Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BS on **Sat. 29 October 2016**, 9.30 - 17.00.

SHA COUNCIL

The current SHA Officers & Council are:

Honorary Council Members

Hon President Dr Allan Chapman

Hon Vice-Pres. Dr Michael Hoskin

Hon Vice-Pres. Prof. Sir Arnold Wolfendale, FRS

Council Members

Acting Chairman Kevin Kilburn

Vice-Chairman Vacant

General & Membership Secretary Bob Bower

Treasurer Roger Hutchins

Editor, SHA Bulletin Clive Davenhall

Editor, SHA e-News David Sellers

Publicity Officer Mike Leggett

Survey Co-ordinator Kevin Johnson

Co-opted member Laura Carroll

Co-opted member Geoff King

Co-opted member Mike Shaw

Co-opted member John Chuter

Co-opted member Gerard Gilligan

Co-opted Officers (non-Council)

Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer Ian Ridpath

Archivist Mark Hurn

Online Editor/Librarian Stuart Williams

SHA COUNCIL MEETINGS

Future meetings of the SHA Council are scheduled as follows:

2015 Sep 12 Birmingham (BMI)

2015 Nov 21 Birmingham (BMI)

SHA members are very welcome to attend Council meetings as observers. Please let the General Secretary know in advance, if you wish to do so.

SHA BADGES?

The SHA Council recently discussed the possibility of obtaining small enamel SHA lapel badges or SHA cloth badges. Before going ahead, however, it was thought best to see if there would be any likely interest amongst the members for such items. If you have views on this proposal, please let us know by emailing or writing to the General Secretary, Bob Bower:

membership@shastro.org.uk

SHA PUBLICATIONS

SHA e-NEWS

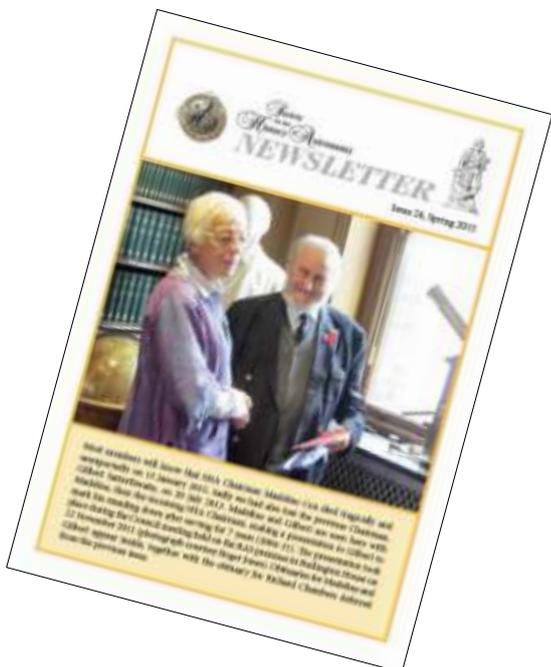
The next issue of the *e-NEWS* is due in early October 2015. If you know of any meetings, publications, exhibitions or events pertaining to the history of astronomy that might interest other members, please email brief details to the editor.



Back issues and guidelines for contributions are available from the [e-News web page](#).

SHA BULLETIN

Unfortunately, issue 24 of the *SHA Bulletin* is now seriously overdue, for which we apologise. It is currently with the layout designers and should be printed and distributed in the first half of July. Contributions to the *Bulletin* are most welcome, including letters which can be on any aspect of the Society or the history of astronomy.



Back issues and guidelines for contributions are available from the [Bulletin's web page](#).

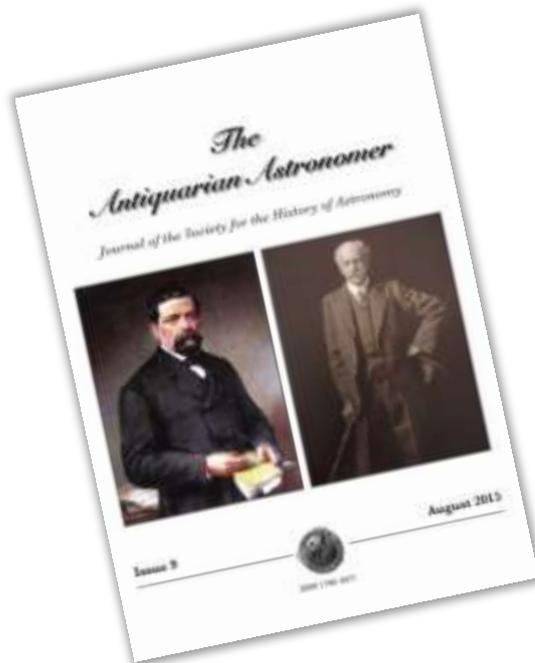
It is usually prudent to check with the Editor before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book reviews). Back Issues of the *Bulletin* (and its predecessor: *SHA Newsletter*) are now indexed on the Abstract service of SAO/ NASA. Enter "SHAN" as the 'Journal Code' at

http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html

It is hoped that in the near future, scanned copies of the original articles will be accessible in the same way.

THE ANTIQUARIAN ASTRONOMER

The anticipated publication date of the next *Antiquarian Astronomer* (no.9) is August.



It will include Bill Sheehan's write-up of his well-received talk on Mars which he gave at the Spring meeting in Greenwich. We also have an inaugural contribution from Carolyn Kennett, who is the SHA's new survey co-ordinator for both Dorset and Cornwall. Her paper is about an expedition to measure the longitude of the Lizard Point made by John Bradley, nephew of the Astronomer Royal James Bradley. Anthony Kinder has contributed a survey of the life and works of Edwin Holmes, discoverer of the periodic Comet Holmes.

Note: the first six issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* have been online at NASA's ADS service since the start of the year. Type "antas" into the box at the top marked Journal Name/Code on this page

http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html

Members and others wishing to submit material for future issues of the *Antiquarian Astronomer* should

contact the Editor, Ian Ridpath at ian@ianridpath.com. [Guidance for authors](#) can be found on our website.

In future, as a result of a Council decision on 13 Sep 2014, any member having a paper published in *The Antiquarian Astronomer* will receive **free membership of the SHA for one year**. Non-members having a paper published will be offered a year's complimentary membership of the SHA.

RESEARCH & WRITING WORKSHOP FOR MEMBERS

SHA Council is aware that a number of Members are researching, but are less confident about writing up, or some have an astronomical interest that they would like to research, but are not sure how to start.

Simultaneously, the editors of *e-News*, *Bulletin* and *Antiquarian Astronomer* all need new material for the SHA publications, and all three editors are very willing to look at drafts and advise or help Members towards their first publication. With the SHA Survey on-line receiving a very encouraging number of 'hits', its new Editor also seeks more short contributions on county astronomers, observatories, and astronomical societies.

Hence we plan to organise a one-day workshop in the new year, at the SHA's Library in the BMI, Birmingham. We would meet first at noon for lunch and chat in the nearby All Bar One, then migrate to the Library. Lee Macdonald (SHA Member, and Deputy Director BAA Historical Section, who will in November complete his PhD on Kew Observatory) has generously agreed to lead the afternoon, starting with a 25 minute presentation '*How to survive in an archive*', and this will include nuts-and-bolts advice regarding on-line research to assess where primary sources are held, and whether it is necessary to visit. A co-presenter [tbn] could use stock from the library to illustrate briefly how to use existing bibliographies. Lee would then chair a discussion of those present relating their own experience or frustrations. With sufficient laptops, we could do some guided live searching on archival websites, and individual problems or ideas can be explored. A summary will discuss seeing research through to publication. The session will close at 5pm.

We are thinking of a Saturday 16 or 30 January or 6 or 13 Feb 2016. Places will probably be limited to about ten people. At this stage we need to assess the level of interest, and issues of concern, so that the workshop can be tailored to best effect.

If you are interested to take advantage of this new initiative, please email roger.hutchins@btinternet.com stating one or two research or writing issues that would particularly interest you, whether you can bring your own laptop, indicate as many of those four dates as possible that you could attend, and identify any

particular subject that you are currently researching or would like to tackle. We can then plan and schedule the workshop to suit the majority, and develop it via an email list of those intending to attend.

Roger Hutchins

NEW SHA PUBLICITY LEAFLETS PRINTED

Two thousand copies of the new glossy SHA publicity leaflet have now been published. If you would like copies for distribution at a forthcoming event in your area or for a relevant visitor centre, etc, that you know of, please do contact Mike Leggett, our Publicity Officer.



New SHA leaflet

continued from page 1

October. These nominations would enable Bob to stand at the AGM for election as Chairman.

Apart from ensuring that SHA will have a strengthened and refreshed Council, it is obviously profoundly healthy and necessary to have fresh views and talent join Council, to review what is bring done, by debate sift many possibilities, and to plan and implement future initiatives. It would be great to find another woman volunteer to join Laura on the team, but meanwhile we hope all Members will echo Council in warmly thanking these five new co-opted councillors for answering the call.

Although we now have members willing to be nominated for positions at the AGM, this in no way precludes others from standing for election. We would welcome other members who wish to 'throw their hats into the ring'.

LIBRARY



Birmingham and Midland Institute, home of the SHA Library

A 74-page [catalogue](#) (Oct 2014)—completed by Madeline Cox—of the thousands of items held by the SHA Library is available on the Society website.

The [Sir Robert Ball Library](#) of the SHA is located at the Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI), 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS—just 10 mins walk from New St and Snow Hill stations.

If you are a member of the SHA and you wish to consult or borrow any items, please arrange a visit in advance with the Librarian: library@shastro.org.uk. The previous postal loan system has now been discontinued.

Open Days

Our Librarian, Stuart Williams, hosted an **open afternoon** on Saturday 9th May 2015 to coincide with the *BAA Meteor Section's* meeting at the BMI. A number of attendees took advantage of this. Stuart had put out a number of meteor-related books plus some early BAA Journals from the first year of the BAA and from 100 years ago, all of which were well received. Each visitor was given an introduction to the SHA and the library.

UNIQUE COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS (c.1908-50) PRESERVED

Moving from the Helwan Observatory in 1924, Harold Knox-Shaw (1885-1970) became the astute and progressive Director of the Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford. He very soon preferred to move the

observatory to a fine climate site in South Africa which he accomplished in 1935. His aspiration may have been inspired partly by the attention he had given to the technologies involved in establishing what became the first British large modern reflector in the southern hemisphere. Knox-Shaw had acquired a stereoscopic photo viewer and camera in Egypt sometime between 1908 and 1922—probably about 1920 since some of the photos can be dated accurately to the early 1920s—and between that date and 1950 he accumulated a cabinet of photos. Some years ago his son Peter gave the valuable kit of viewer, storage cabinet, camera, accessories, and the 380 glass stereoscopic photographs that he took, all in immaculate condition, to Anne Charles who was with her astrophysicist husband in South Africa. Anne and Peter have just now jointly given the whole 'kit' and photographs to the University of Oxford to ensure their preservation.

This major donation's 380 slides include astronomical subjects such as observatories, instruments, giant telescopes in the course of erection, eclipse expeditions, groups of delegates at astronomical meetings, etc. Knox-Shaw generously ensured that the historic instruments of the Radcliffe Observatory in Oxford were preserved and passed to the Museum of the History of Science in the 1930s, so it is especially appropriate that his stereoscopic photos now find a home there. Archivist Tony Simcock commented that the photos are technically excellent but also have an endearingly informal, snapshot quality. He rightly suggests that an appreciation of Knox-Shaw is broadened by the association with him of this collection. Its value is considerably enhanced by the comprehensive documentation, research and identification of subjects that has in recent years been accomplished by the assiduous research of Anne Charles.

Our thanks go to Tony Simcock for making us aware of this important new addition to the history of astronomy.

AN UNUSUAL AND PROLIFIC BLOG TO SUBSCRIBE TO

A blog you should consider signing up to, and watch, is that of the scholars of the Museum for the History of Science, Oxford. The general page link to MHS blogs is: <http://blogs.mhs.ox.ac.uk/>

There you will find a fascinating account of research by Tony Simcock and new information about Warren De la Rue's moon camera and photos of the 1850s, with link: <http://blogs.mhs.ox.ac.uk/insidemhs/to-capture-the-moon/>

You will also find there Tony's just as important and interesting blog on Regiomontanus, and of course there's much more. For a tantalising introduction to

'Paper Instruments' try:

<http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/collections/library/paper-instruments/>

or an essay in progress on stereoscopic photographs:

<http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/collections/search/display-narrative/?irn=29470&index=0>

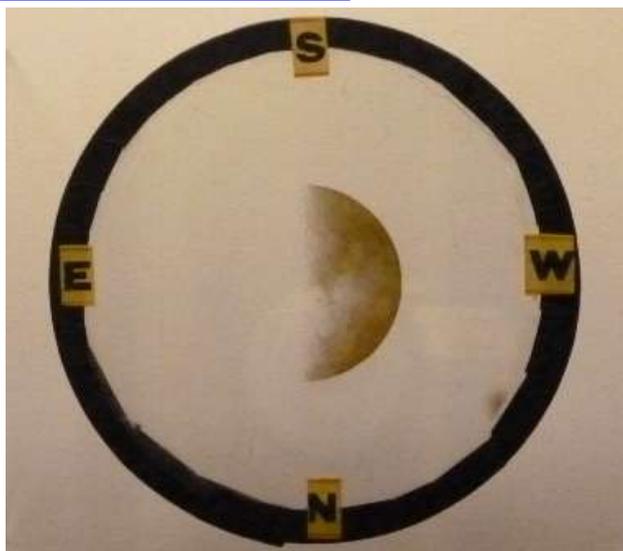


image: courtesy of the Oxford Museum of the History of Science

FAS SPEAKERS LIST

As you may know, the SHA is affiliated to the Federation of Astronomical Societies. They publish a list of speakers annually, and the next issue is scheduled soon. Giving a talk on an astronomical history topic to a local Ast Soc is an excellent way raising the profile of the SHA and gaining new members. Most of our recent new members have joined via the local Ast Soc route. Several of you, of course, already do give talks and are on the FAS list - a good example is Mike Leggett, our Publicity Officer, who is tireless in this role.

I am keen to see the SHA membership rise significantly above the 150 or so that it has been at for the past few years. I would encourage you to help us in this activity if you are not already on the list.

The editor of the FAS Speakers List is Frank Johns (frankjohns@btinternet.com). He is currently gathering data for the next list. He would need your input before the end of July to be sure of getting an entry. He will need your name, email address, talk topics, distance you are prepared to travel, and any other conditions

(e.g. what expenses you would expect). I would suggest you also mention your membership of the SHA.

CITY OBSERVATORY CALTON HILL, EDINBURGH

Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH) has awarded an interim grant of £120,000 as part of [a major project to transform the City Observatory on Calton Hill](#) into an arts centre and new home for the Collective Gallery. The EWH grant will help to fund exterior conservation works to the category A listed building, particularly repairs to the stonework and roof.

The City Observatory was designed by William Playfair and completed in 1822 for the Astronomical Institution. The plan is for the building to become an all year-round arts venue, open to the public on a permanent basis for the first time.



Calton Hill Observatory (photo: David Sellers)

Working with the City of Edinburgh Council, the Collective Gallery aims to create a new gallery on the site, along with interpretation of its heritage and the telescopes and astronomical instruments of the observatory.

The Old Observatory House (the James Craig building) has been taken over by the Vivat Trust, and is now run as [iconic holiday accommodation](#).

Watch this space!

NEW MEMBERS

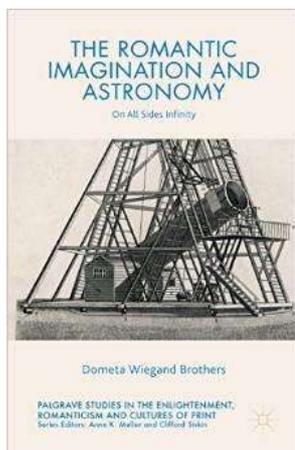
The Society welcomes the following new members, who have joined since the last e-News:

*Carolyn Bedwell
Howard & Penny Charlton
James Dawson
Thomas Weidner*

FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

[The Romantic Imagination and Astronomy: On All Sides Infinity](#), by Dometa Wiegand Brothers

(Palgrave), April 2015, pp.216 (hardback, £55.00), ISBN 9781137474346

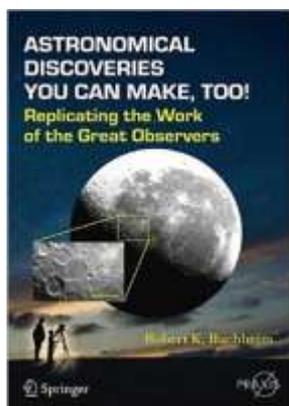


The Romantic Imagination and Astronomy reconstructs the history of the science of astronomy and its importance to the Romantic imagination in exploration and colonization by imperial England. It examines how the science of astronomy in exploration and discovery, from Edmund Halley and William Herschel to Captain

Cook, changed the world by tying the 'pure' science of astronomy to the practical, commercial, and martial aims of navigation for the maritime nation of England. It demonstrates that the same 'pure' science of astronomy also fueled the Romantic poetic imagination, influencing the evolution of form and content of poetry — from formation of the greater Romantic lyric of Barbauld and Coleridge, to the fantastic narratives of Keats and Shelley.

[Astronomical Discoveries You Can Make, Too!: Replicating the Work of the Great Observers](#),

Robert K Buchheim (Springer-Praxis), Jun.2015, pp.564 (paperback, £24.99), ISBN 9783319156590



Follow in the steps of the great astronomers such as Hipparchus, Galileo, Kepler and Hubble, who all contributed so much to our modern understanding of the cosmos. This book gives the student or amateur astronomer the following tools to replicate some of these seminal observations

from their own homes:

With your own eyes: Use your own observations and measurements to discover and confirm the phenomena of the seasons, the analemma and the equation of time,

the logic behind celestial coordinates, and even the precession of the equinoxes.

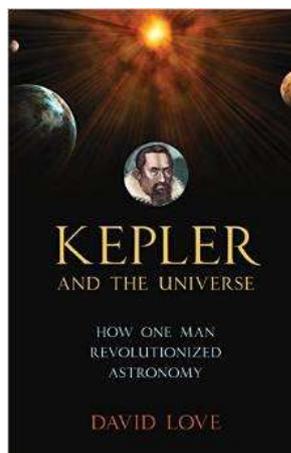
With a consumer-grade digital camera: Record the changing brightness of an eclipsing binary star and show that a pulsating star changes color as it brightens and dims. Add an inexpensive diffraction grating to your camera and see the variety of spectral features in the stars, and demonstrate that the Sun's spectrum is similar to one particular type of stellar spectrum.

With a backyard telescope: Add a CCD imager and you can measure the scale of the Solar System and the distance to a nearby star. You could even measure the distance to another galaxy and observe the cosmological redshift of the expanding universe.

Astronomical Discoveries You Can Make, Too! doesn't just tell you about the development of astronomy; it shows you how to discover for yourself the essential features of the universe.

[Kepler and the Universe: How One Man Revolutionized Astronomy](#), by David Love

(Prometheus Books), Nov.2015, pp.255 (hardback, £15.84), ISBN 9781633881068



Originally self-published by SHA member David Love, the new version published by Prometheus will bring it to a wider readership.

A contemporary of Galileo and a forerunner of Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was a pioneering German scientist and a pivotal figure in the history of astronomy. This

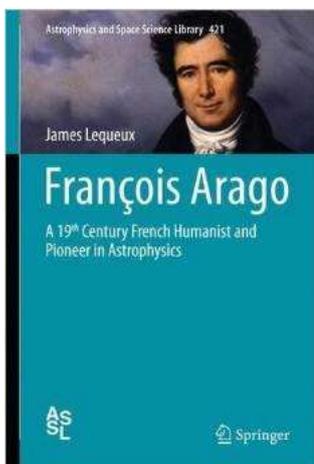
colorful, well-researched biography brings the man and his scientific discoveries to life, showing how his contributions were every bit as important as those of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton.

It was Kepler who first advocated the completely new concept of a physical force emanating from the sun that controls the motion of the planets--today we call this gravity and take it for granted. He also established that the orbits of the planets were elliptical in shape and not circular. And his three laws of planetary motion are still used by contemporary astronomers and space scientists.

The author focuses not just on these and other momentous breakthroughs but also on Kepler's arduous life, punctuated by frequent tragedy and hardships. His first wife died young, and eight of the twelve children he fathered succumbed to disease in infancy or childhood. He was frequently caught up in the religious persecutions of the day. His mother narrowly escaped death when she was accused of being a witch.

Intermingling historical and personal details of Kepler's life with lucid explanations of his scientific research, this book presents a sympathetic portrait of the man and underscores his achievement.

[François Arago: A 19th Century French Humanist and Pioneer in Astrophysics](#), by James Lequeux (Springer), Sep.2015, pp.255 (hardback, £117.00), ISBN 9783319207223



François Arago, the first to show in 1810 that the surface of the Sun and stars is made of incandescent gas and not solid or liquid, was a prominent physicist of the 19th century. He used his considerable influence to help Fresnel, Ampere and others develop their ideas and make themselves known. This book covers

his personal contributions to physics, astronomy, geodesy and oceanography, which are far from negligible, but insufficiently known. Arago was also an important and influential political man who, for example, abolished slavery in the French colonies. One of the last humanists, he had a very broad culture and range of interests. In parallel to his biography, this title also covers the spectacular progresses of science at the time of Arago, especially in France: the birth of physical optics, electromagnetism and thermodynamics. François Arago's life is a fascinating epic tale that reads as a novel.

Note: *The descriptions of the books above are largely taken from the publishers. They are not reviews and do not imply endorsement by the SHA.*

SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA Small Research Grants are still available for the period **1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015** and applications are solicited. These grants are made available to provide limited financial support for members' research.

For 2014/15 a total sum of £1000 has been set aside to provide research grants and members may submit applications for up to this amount. Grants may be used to support research in any aspect of the history of astronomy, broadly understood, and may be used to fund any expenses incurred while pursuing such a research project. The grants are available only to SHA members in good standing.

Links to the [application form and regulations](#) for applicants are available on the Society's Web site. Applications must be made using the application form. Appended to the regulations are some guidelines for completing the case for support that forms part of every application.

Applications will be judged by the SHA Awards Committee whose decision is final. Successful applicants should note that items claimed for reimbursement must be accompanied by receipts to the full value of the item.

Completed applications should be sent to the SHA Acting-Chairman, Kevin Kilburn (kevinkilburn@sky.com)

DOWNLOADABLE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY NEWSLETTERS & JOURNALS

Here are links to a some freely downloadable newsletters and journals that SHA members might find of interest:

[Journal for Astronomical History and Heritage](#)
(published in PDF format three times yearly)

[British Astronomical Association - Historical Section Newsletter](#)
(published in PDF format twice yearly)

[Newsletter of the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society](#)
(published in PDF format twice yearly)

WEB-LINKS NOTICED

Science Museum Group Journal

Issue 03 of the Science Museum Group Journal has now been published and is available to view online at: <http://journal.sciencemuseum.org.uk/issues/spring-2015/>. The 3rd issue is on the theme of Communications. This partly celebrates the opening of Information Age, the Science Museum's new permanent gallery on the history of communications.

The SMG Journal presents peer-reviewed papers that are relevant to the wide-ranging interests of the Science Museum Group. It welcomes submissions from authors in museums and universities world-wide while sharing research conducted by SMG's four national museums.

If you wish to receive automatic notification of new issue publications, you may subscribe to the Journal free of charge here:

<http://journal.sciencemuseum.org.uk/subscribe/>

Far Side of the Moore - Radio 4 drama

This affectionate drama, brilliantly portraying the sometimes fraught relationships between the SHA's late Hon. President, Patrick Moore, his BAA colleagues, and his BBC producer, was last broadcast at the end of March 2015. It starred Tom Hollander as Patrick and Patricia Hodge as his mother, Gertrude.

Unfortunately, the podcast of the drama is no longer available on the [BBC's website](http://www.bbc.com). However, do not despair: the full script of the drama can be downloaded free of charge from:

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scripts/Far-Side-Of-The-Moore.pdf>

It's 1957 and the little-known Patrick is living with his mother in East Grinstead, from where he studies the heavens and writes popular factual works on astronomy, as well as science fiction under a pseudonym. When his latest book *Suns, Myths And Men* gets a terrible review from Dr Henry King, Patrick is in despair and, when the phone rings, he braces himself for more bad news.

This is the story of how the self-taught astronomer, whose Moon maps were later used by the Apollo missions, became the presenter of *The Sky at Night*. But it's also the story of a mysterious love affair, and a window into the mind of one of the nation's favourite broadcasters.

Production by [Perfectly Normal Productions](http://www.perfectlynormalproductions.com).

HESKETH PARK OBSERVATORY

The historic Astronomical Observatory in Hesketh Park, Southport will have 6 public open days this season. The observatory, built in 1901, houses a Thomas Cooke 6-inch refractor telescope which was made in 1869. The observatory and telescope was given as a public gift by its owner Joseph Baxendell Jnr, in memory of his father.



Photo c.1904

The observatory is now managed by the [Fernley Observatory Heritage Group](http://www.fernleyobservatoryheritagegroup.co.uk) who are working with the Parks Department of Sefton Council, to restore the observatory into a working centre for the study of astronomy and space research.

On the remaining open days (incl. 26 Jul & 29 Aug 2015) there will be displays of astronomy hardware, talks by members of the Southport Astronomical Society and others, and displays of space rockets and information on space exploration.



MEET OUR MEMBERS

SHA members introduce themselves and their interests

In this issue: *John Chuter (Langport, Somerset)*



How did you find the SHA, and does it meet your needs?

I have been in the BAA for well over 30 years now, and have been aware of the SHA since it was formed and had thought about joining on a number of occasions. I have become more interested in the History of Astronomy over the last few years so it seemed a good idea to join about two years ago I think it was.

Do you have a special area of interest in history of astronomy?

I am interested in the history of solar eclipse expeditions and increasingly with the history of aurora observations, and also the history of astrophotography. I have also had one or two lucky finds and am interested in discovering more about them.

What got you hooked on that?

I have always had photography generally as a hobby and it was a natural evolution for that to move into astrophotography. I grew up with the 1999 total eclipse always in the future, and was one of the unlucky ones in Cornwall not to see it because of the clouds. It is now incredibly 16 years in the past but that experience has led on to me actually seeing a couple in clear skies and developing an interest in the history of eclipse expeditions.

What did you discover in that area that enthuses you most?

It would be difficult to pinpoint one thing. It is the lucky finds I think. One of these is something that

occurred to me when in France with some friends and we stayed with Olly Penrice at Les Granges where he runs an astronomy B&B. Prior to that we went to Arles, where an extremely famous artist lived in the 1880's. I'll leave you to ponder. One of the lucky finds I have mentioned already to others are many dozens of letters written by William Lassell to Sir John Hippisley in the Somerset County Archive. These letters go into great detail on his telescope making experiments, drawings of his moon discoveries of Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, trips to Malta from where several letters are written and even letters from an Eclipse Trip to Sweden from the liner that took him. There are also letters from James Nasmyth and Warren de La Rue.

Do you actively research, or prefer being an armchair scholar?

Actively, yes, as mentioned previously, but mainly armchair.

If you're thrown out of the library balloon, what one book would you grab to save?

The biggest one I could lay my hands on, it might make a good parachute! Seriously though, for this piece I will say, *'The Larousse Encyclopaedia of Astronomy'*.

Another book I have just come across which I think I would take is called *'Catchers of the Light'* by Stefan Hughes. This is a two volume set on the History of Astrophotography. It is the most amazing piece of research on the subject. It actually costs £130 to buy as a book but is only a quarter of the price when purchased electronically. So I guess I would have to grab my iPad as that is where the book is!!

Why?

The Larousse was the book that got me interested in astronomy when I was 7 yrs old. I do not remember how I came by it but I read it from cover to cover and that was it. Re the Stefan Hughes book, I read David Hughes glowing review in *'The Observatory'* and decided to take a look. He is completely correct. It is a stunning piece of work. Jay Pasachoff wrote the foreword. Need I say more.

What one thing would you most like the SHA to do better or differently?

I find the SHA to consist of a very friendly bunch of people; the quality of publications and meetings are extremely high. I have been to the library a couple of times. It is not possible to borrow many of books as they are for reference only, and only those who live near Birmingham can get in easily to borrow any of the others, and I feel that the whole library policy needs to be looked at.

SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

Kevin Johnson, our new Survey Co-ordinator, has been busy getting to grips with the nuts & bolts of the Survey website and is hoping to make it more resilient and easier to search. There is now an astonishing wealth of information on the website and one of Kevin's chief priorities is to ensure that it becomes more useful to researchers by ensuring that sources are properly cited. Please take note of this when submitting material.

Visits to the survey website so far this year are significantly up on the numbers for the equivalent period last year. The overwhelming majority of visitors, naturally, are from Britain, followed by the United States, Canada, Australia, Eire, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The Survey aims to reveal the depth of local history of astronomy across the UK and is available both [online](#) and at the SHA's library in Birmingham.

SHA PUBLICITY STALLS

The SHA was represented with a publicity stall at the **Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge**, Open Day in March.

Unfortunately, due to clashes of dates, we were unable to be at the **Webb Society Convention** (IoA, Cambridge), as intended, on 20th June 2015.

Hopefully, we will have stalls at the **FAS Convention** on 24 Oct 2015 at the University of Birmingham, and maybe at the Leeds Astromeet on 7th November at Leeds University.

If you will be at such events or live in the area and could spare an hour or two to help on a stall, it would be much appreciated. For further information or offers of help, contact the Publicity Officer, Mike Leggett (leggett189@btinternet.com).

A new tri-part full-colour SHA publicity leaflet is currently in production.



SHA publicity stall on 21 Mar 2015

(photo: Mark Hurn)

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

William Benjamin Hutchinson

I'm currently researching into the life and astronomical history of one **William Benjamin Hutchinson**, (1863-1898), one time President of Liverpool Astronomical Society between 1890-91. Born London, Married Annie Pitt in 1887. Died Southport 1898.

He was a Civil Engineer, spending several years travelling, and took part in a major expedition across Central Africa.

From 1884-1894 he lived at 'The Observatory' Liversedge, Yorkshire, which had a 6 inch Grubb, and also a 5.5 inch and 3 inch transit by Cooke. His main interests were Lunar and Saturn Observations. He was an expert in the construction of astronomical instruments, including mirrors and lenses. He was an FRAS. There is evidence he gave lectures within the Leeds area.

I would welcome any additional information, records of observations, and a likeness if one exists.

Gerard Gilligan (ggastro@liverpool.ac.uk)

Sidney Bertram Gaythorpe

Does anyone know of a photograph of SB Gaythorpe (1880-1964) of Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria (formerly Lancashire)? He was an engraver by trade, but in his spare time carried on a single-minded 50-year pursuit unearthing information about Jeremiah Horrocks (c.1619-1641). I would be grateful to be advised where a photo portrait could be found.

David Sellers (enews@shastro.org.uk)

Dr Bangay's Observatory, Lyme Regis

An American correspondent of the SHA is interested in Dr Richard Bangay (1834-1931) who—according to the SHA Survey—had a ‘large observatory’ at his house, Belmont, above Lyme Regis, Dorset, from about 1883. Our correspondent would be very grateful for any information regarding the size and make of the telescope(s) he owned.

*Info. to Roger Hutchins, please
(roger.hutchins@btinternet.com)*

OTHER MEETINGS & EXHIBITIONS NOTICED (non-SHA)

The 9th Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena (INSAP IX)

This year's [INSAP conference](#) is on August 23–28 2015, at Gresham College, London. Details given in previous issue of SHA e-News.

The INSAP Conferences are a series of international meetings, held every three years or so, that explore the effect on humanity and human culture of the glorious spectacles we see in the sky by night and by day. <http://www.insap.org/>

Mayas: revelation of an endless time (Liverpool)

Opening on 19 June and running until 18 October 2015 at the World Museum in Liverpool, [this free exhibition](#) looks back thousands of years through time to the Mesoamerican civilisation of the ancient Maya.

Visitors will take an illuminating journey to an age of warriors, astronomy, and shamanic rituals.

What made the ancient Mayas look to the stars? Why was their civilisation so powerful? How did they communicate?

Through 385 stunning objects from museums and historical sites in Mexico the exhibition explores this extraordinary people whose culture is still alive today.

The exhibition has been produced by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in Mexico. It is part of the 2015 ‘Year of Mexico in the United Kingdom’ and ‘Year of the United Kingdom in Mexico’.

24th Annual Convention of the Antique Telescope Society

9–12 Oct. at the Lick Observatory, Mt. Hamilton, CA (USA).

This will include side trips to Ricard Observatory, Chabot Observatory and UC Santa Cruz’ Optical Shop, Mechanical Shop and Center for Adaptive Optics. Membership in the ATS is not required.

Science, Technologies and Material Culture in the History of Education (Liverpool)

[Annual Conference of the History of Education Society](#) (UK) at Liverpool Hope University, 20th-22nd November 2015

Often the history of science and technology and the history of education have been written at a remove from each other despite being intimately connected. This conference aims to bring these two significant and related areas of historiography into closer dialogue with one another.

BAA Historical Section Conference May 2016

Saturday 21st May 2016, at the Quaker meeting house, School St, Liverpool L1 3BT.

From 10:00 - 17:00, doors open 09:30 (TBC)

The theme of the conference (if any) will be announced in due course.

For 2017 the Historical Section is hoping to meet at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh, Blackford Hill, Edinburgh.

For further information, keep an eye on the [Section's website](#)

e-News CONTACT DETAILS

Communications relating to SHA e-News should be sent to the **Editor**: enews@shastro.org.uk

General communications to the Society should be sent to the **General Secretary** (Bob Bower): membership@shastro.org.uk

REVELATIONS: EXPERIMENTS IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Exhibition review by Clive Davenhall

***Revelations* is currently showing at the Science Museum, London until 13 September 2015. Admission: £8.00. Suitable for adults and children aged 8 and over. After its run in London *Revelations* will show at the National Media Museum, Bradford from 19 November 2015 to 7 February 2016.**

The [exhibition *Revelations*](#) investigates the development of scientific photography during the nineteenth century and its subsequent influence on the practices and subject matter of art photography during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The exhibition occupies three rooms. The first presents examples of early scientific photography drawn from a number of disciplines, including: astronomy (the astronomical items included are listed below); electrical discharges, both in the laboratory and natural lightning; high-speed photography, typically sequences showing humans or animals in motion or objects dropped into liquids; early X-ray photographs and micrographs, photographs of plant, animal and mineral specimens taken through a microscope, including some by the early pioneer of photography Henry Fox Talbot.

The second and third rooms explore the influence of scientific photography on the practice of art photography respectively from the early twentieth century to *circa* 1975 and during the last quarter of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first.

I found the first room easily the most interesting; all the photographs are fascinating, not just the astronomical ones. This preference undoubtedly just reflects my own interests; I am more interested in the early development of photography and its application to astronomy, in particular, but also to other sciences, than I am in twentieth and twenty-first century art photography. Having said that, the second room contains some striking images: the micrographs of Carl Stüwe, the quasi-abstractions of György Kepes and the images of Berenice Abbott, which were used as illustrations in American science text books. These images are perhaps easier to admire than to like, but are nonetheless very impressive. The final room of more modern work left me largely unmoved. The exhibition is very well worth a visit and affords a rare opportunity to see an extensive collection of early astronomical and other scientific photographs.

There is also a book, *Revelations* *, to accompany the exhibition, edited by Ben Burbridge, one of the curators. It is not a catalogue in the conventional sense.



A 60-min exposure of the Great Nebula in Orion made by Andrew Ainslie Common on 26 February 1883

Rather, it is a series of essays by various authors on the themes explored in the exhibition. Like the exhibition with which they are linked, the essays are a mixed bag, but some certainly make interesting and informative reading. The book is well-edited, lavishly produced, profusely illustrated and modestly priced. The photographs alone would be worth the price.

An expanded version of this review may appear in a future issue of the Bulletin.

Astronomical Photographs Exhibited

Items are listed chronologically, though that is not how the exhibition is hung.

1842. John William Draper, daguerreotype of the solar spectrum.

1851. John Adams Whipple and George Phillips Bond, two daguerreotypes of the Moon.

1857-1862. Warren de la Rue, stereographs of the Moon.

1858. James Nasmyth and James Carpenter, lunar craters photographed from models. Taken from the second (1874) edition of their *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World and a Satellite*. One of their models is on permanent display elsewhere in the Museum.

1861-1863. Revd William Selwyn and John Titterton, a booklet of autographs of the Sun taken at Ely between September 1861 and May 1863.

1878. Pierre Jules Janssen, sunspots and solar granulation.

1883. Andrew Ainslie Common, a series of images of the Great Nebula in Orion made with a variety of exposure times.

1912. Edward H. Stubington, a time-series of the eclipse of 17 April 1912 photographed from St Petersburg.

~1920. Léon Gimpel, false colour stereoscopic anaglyphs of the Moon

1901. Frank Dyson, silver bromide prints of photographs of a solar eclipse showing the corona.

Finally, though not strictly astronomical there is a photograph of a cloud formation that Charles Piazzi Smyth, the Second Astronomer Royal for Scotland, took from his home at Clova, Ripon, in 1892 during his retirement.

* Ben Burbridge (ed), [*Revelations*](#). 2015, London, MACK in association with Media Space, SCMG Enterprise. ISBN 978 190 794 6455, pp216, £25.00. Available on-line from the Science Museum shop.

Editor's Note: After its run in London, [*Revelations will go on show at the National Media Museum, Bradford*](#) from 19 November 2015 – 7 February 2016.

LETTERS

ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY HISTORY

Dear Editor,

On reading the recent *SHA e-News* I am prompted to write a little about recent happenings with the Plymouth Astronomical Society (PAS).

I remember many years ago when I first joined the PAS that Ian Ridpath (current AA Editor) lent us a set of 35m slides, I think they were on Light Pollution.

Until recently I was the Chairman of the PAS and remained so for some 25 years, until January of this year when I stepped down as Chairman.

The new Chairman is David Wilton and details of the Committee can be found on our web site.

February of this year marked an auspicious occasion when we celebrated our 50th Anniversary. A celebratory party was held at Plymouth University where we hold our monthly meetings.

The original founder Lawrence Harris—now living in Stow Upland, Suffolk—was unable to be present, but he had recorded a very nice video presentation which described the founding of the PAS when he was just a 19 year old student, and had been encouraged and helped greatly by Patrick Moore who subsequently became Patron of the PAS and remained so until his passing. Our new Patron is Professor David Southwood, formerly head of Space Robotics at ESA, and now teaching at a University in Leuven, Belgium.

A photograph of Lawrence together with Patrick was published in a recent SHA publication.

Our Anniversary celebration was a great success and we are hoping that the PAS will continue on for a further 50 years.

Thank you and best wishes,

Alan G. Penman (Plymouth Astronomical Society)

SUMMARY DATES FOR THE DIARY

2015 MEETINGS

19 Jun. –18 Oct. Maya: revelation of an endless time exhibition, World Museum (Liverpool). Further details are given elsewhere in this *e-News*.

23–28 Aug. 9th Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, Gresham College, London. Further details are given elsewhere in this *e-News*.

9–12 Oct. 24th Annual Convention of the Antique Telescope Society will be hosted at Lick Observatory, Mt. Hamilton, CA (USA). Further details are given elsewhere in this *e-News*.

Sat 31 Oct. SHA Autumn Conference and AGM, at the BMI in central Birmingham.

20–22 Nov. Science, Technologies and Material Culture in the History of Education conference, Liverpool Hope University. Further details are given elsewhere in this *e-News*.
