



SHA e-News

Society for the History of Astronomy

Volume 8, no.2, April 2016.

Editor: David Sellers



Plaque at the Herschel's house in Bath

(Photograph by Mike Peel (www.mikepeel.net).

Herschel Museum of Astronomy/Wikimedia Commons)

FROM KEPLER TO COSMIC RAYS

As this issue of *e-News* is hitting 'inboxes', SHA members and members of the William Herschel Society will be about to gather in Bath for a joint conference covering more than 400 years of astronomy. The Spring 2016 Conference will be held at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. The day will feature talks on Johannes Kepler and William Herschel, West-Country astronomical history, and the story of cosmic ray investigation. At the end of the afternoon attendees will be treated to a reception at the house in New King Street once occupied by Sir William Herschel – now the Herschel Museum of Astronomy. Register now to ensure your place (see p2).

SHA WORKSHOP: 'RESEARCHING ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY'

In answer to several requests from the SHA membership, this free workshop was held in Birmingham (on Sat. 30 January 2016) to help

members with their own projects in astronomical history. The timetable for the afternoon consisted of several presentations with advice and guidance on using archives, researching local history, and biographical research into both national and local figures. There was also a short session on writing and publishing the collected research to share with other like-minded historians.

The facilitators for the workshop were David Sellers and Dr Lee Macdonald, both very experienced researchers, who between them have had many research papers and books published. Having recently successfully completed a PhD, Lee shared his own advice on obtaining the very best from visits to libraries and archives, and how to save both time and expense. David had a great deal of knowledge and experience in researching local history and biographical information, and his guidance on having research efforts published, together with issues of copyright, was invaluable. Both David and Lee provided hand-outs and there was also the opportunity to download digital resources.



The ten attendees at the workshop have responded with only high praise for David and Lee, and it looks certain that once demand can be judged, these valuable workshops can and will be repeated for interested SHA members in the not too distant future. If you would be interested in a re-run, please let us know.

Report by Gerard Gilligan

FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

2016 SPRING CONFERENCE

The 2016 SHA Spring Conference will be held on **Sat. 2 April 2016**, jointly with the William Herschel Society, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, 16 Queen Sq., BA1 2HN. Speakers include:

Roger Moses on *100 years of Cosmic Rays*

David Love on *Johannes Kepler*

Francis Ring on *Sir William Herschel and the Bath Philosophical Society*

John Chuter on *Somerset Astronomers*

Richard Mansfield on *Bristol Astronomical Society: past, present and future*

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

Members who wish to attend should contact [Mike Leggett](#). The usual payment rate will apply, £5 SHA (and WHS) members and £10 non-members.

2016 SUMMER PICNIC

SHA member Christopher Taylor and his wife Rowenna will be our hosts at the [Hanwell Community Observatory](#) on Sat. 2 July. The Observatory is situated in the grounds of their home, Hanwell Castle, Oxon. The event is free. Bring your own victuals. Car parking on site is restricted (first come first served), but more is available in Hanwell village 200 yds away. Please advise [Bob Bower](#) if you wish to attend.

2016 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

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

Allan Chapman (*subject TBA*)

Bill Barton on *The Chaldean Astronomical Society*

Lee Macdonald on *George Airy and the Origins of the Magnetic and Meteorological Department at Greenwich*

Mike Leggett on *The Hartwell Synod: Dr John Lee, Admiral Smyth and their associates*

Enquiries to Gerard Gilligan
(ggastro@liverpool.ac.uk)

Price and booking details will be available in a future issue of *SHA e-News*.

2017 CONFERENCES

The Spring Conference for 2017 will be taking place at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge on Sat. 22 April, close to the bicentenary of the death of the French astronomer, Charles Messier (26 June 1730-12 April 1817). It is hoped that some of the content will reflect his life and work. The AGM/Conference for 2017 will be on Sat. 28 October 2017 at the Birmingham & Midland Institute.

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

Chairman Bob Bower

Vice-Chairman Vacant

General Secretary Laura Carroll

Treasurer Geoff King

Membership Secretary Mike Shaw

Editor, SHA Bulletin Vacant

Editor, SHA e-News David Sellers

Publicity Officer Mike Leggett

Survey Coordinator Kevin Johnson

Online Editor John Chuter

Librarian James Dawson

Member without portfolio Gerard Gilligan

Co-opted Officers (non-Council)

Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer Ian Ridpath

Archivist Mark Hurn

Assistant Librarian Carolyn Bedwell

Historical Records Officer Anthony Kinder

SHA COUNCIL MEETINGS

The following SHA Council are scheduled for 2016:

June 04 Birmingham (BMI)

September 03 Birmingham (BMI)

November 19 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.

PRESENTATIONS & POSTERS?

If you would like to give a presentation, or exhibit posters relating to your research, at future SHA events please contact the [General Secretary](#) in the first instance.

SHA PUBLICATIONS

SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early July 2016. 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

Issue 24 of the *SHA Bulletin* has been distributed to all members. It is hoped that future issues will now appear



on a more regular basis. No. 25 should be published in Spring 2016. 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 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 *Antiquarian Astronomer* issue no. 9 was published in early September 2015. The next issue is due in the Summer of 2016.



Note: the first six issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* have been online at NASA’s ADS service since the start of 2015. 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.

SHA LIBRARY NEWS



The SHA Library at the BMI

Work in the library continues, and James Dawson and Carolyn Bedwell are now working hard to conduct a stock-take of all existing books and materials in the collection. The image above shows the library after the addition of books which have been left to the Society by Gilbert Satterthwaite and Madeline Cox. More recently James collected about 50 books from Sally Jones, wife of the late Roger Jones. The books in these bequests have now mostly been listed and are waiting to be merged with the existing catalogue which James hopes to be able to release in the summer.

James and Carolyn are also compiling a list of items which will be sold on, preferentially to SHA Members, and whilst this list has not yet been published it currently includes nearly 300 titles. Again it is hoped there will be more news about this before the summer.

Despite the work being undertaken in the library it is still very much open for business. A list of dates the library will be open is on the website, and is reproduced here:

Tue 12 April
 Thu 28 April
 Tue 3 May
 Mon 16 May
 Sat 4 June
 Mon 20 June

The library is scheduled to be open between 10am and 3pm on the dates listed, though invariably it is open between 8.30am and 6pm, but please do contact the library in advance of a visit if you wish to come outside of the 10am-3pm opening times.

If you are interested in visiting the library, or lending a hand (and this can easily be done from the comfort of your own home using a computer), want some help undertaking some research, or would like to donate any books or other material, please do get in contact with James who would love to hear from you: library@shastro.org.uk

SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA Small Research Grants are available for the period **1 September 2015 to 31 December 2016** and applications are solicited. These grants are made available to provide limited financial support for members' research.

For 2015/16 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, 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.

CHARITY STATUS FOR THE SHA?

The SHA, founded in 2002, has always been a non-profit making organisation which exists to promote the history of astronomy and to re-discover our astronomical heritage. Its valuable Survey of Astronomical History is freely available on the web and its meetings and conferences are open to interested members of the public. In every respect, you might think, an ideal candidate for charitable status.

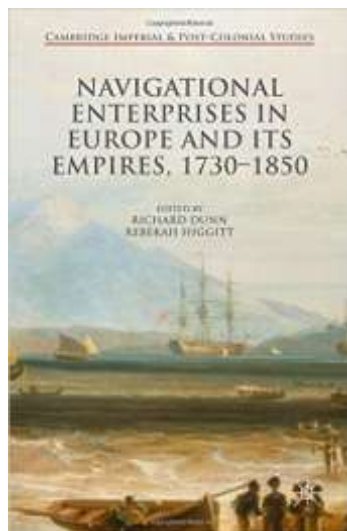
Being a registered charity would not only underscore the basic ethos of the organisation, it would also make us eligible for 'gift aid' claims to the HMRC and strengthen our hand, if we should ever wish to apply for external funding.

At its February meeting, therefore, the Council agreed to establish a sub-committee to draft a definite proposal to seek registration with the [Charity Commission](#). This will be submitted to the next Council meeting, with a view to placing a motion and an amended constitution before the SHA Annual General Meeting in October.

If you have strong feelings or advice to give to the Council on this proposal, please make your views known via the SHA Treasurer, [Geoff King](#).

FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

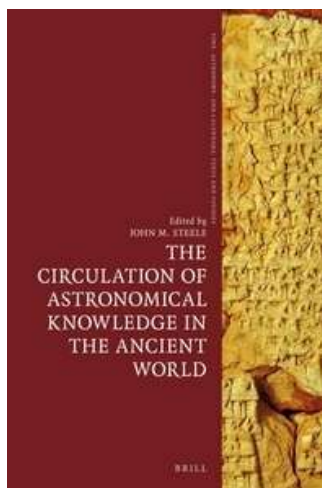
[Navigational Enterprises in Europe and its Empires, 1730–1850](#), R. Higgitt, R. Dunn, P. Jones (eds) (Palgrave Macmillan), Nov 2015, pp.259 (hardback, £63.00), ISBN 9781137520630



This book brings together the work of international authors to explore European experiences in the development of new navigational techniques and instruments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is the period in which the ‘longitude problem’ has been presented as being

solved in an unproblematic way. Challenging this narrative, the book looks beyond just the British story to examine the role of governments, institutions, scientists, practitioners and navigators across Europe, and the use of the new and old techniques and instruments in practice. As the different chapters show, the methods available, including navigational techniques such as dead reckoning and the newer astronomical and timekeeping methods of longitude determination, were complementary rather than exclusive.

[The Circulation of Astronomical Knowledge in the Ancient World](#), by J.M. Steele (Brill), May 2016, pp.520 (hardback, £154.05), ISBN 9789004315617

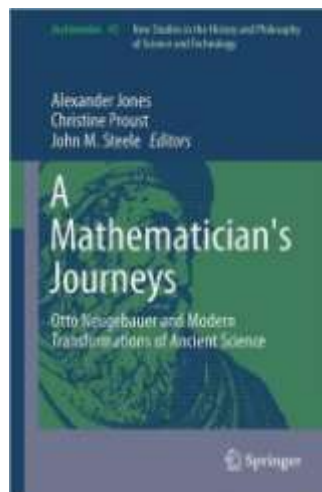


Astronomical and astrological knowledge circulated in many ways in the ancient world: in the form of written texts and through oral communication; by the conscious assimilation of sought-after knowledge and the unconscious absorption of ideas to which scholars were exposed.

The Circulation of Astronomical Knowledge

in the Ancient World explores the ways in which astronomical knowledge circulated between different communities of scholars over time and space, and what was done with that knowledge when it was received. Examples are discussed from Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, India, and China.

[A Mathematician's Journeys: Otto Neugebauer and Modern Transformations of Ancient Science](#), by A. Jones, C. Proust, J.M. Steele (Springer), Feb 2016, pp.356 (hardback, £74.50), ISBN 9783319258638



This book explores facets of Otto Neugebauer's career, his impact on the history and practice of mathematics, and the ways in which his legacy has been preserved or transformed in recent decades, looking ahead to the directions in which the study of the history of science will head in the twenty-first century. Neugebauer, more than any other scholar of recent times, shaped the way we perceive pre-modern science. Through his scholarship and influence on students and collaborators, he inculcated both an approach to historical research on ancient and medieval mathematics and astronomy through precise mathematical and philological study of texts, and a vision of these sciences as systems of knowledge and method that spread outward from the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, crossing cultural boundaries and circulating over a tremendous geographical expanse of the Old World from the Atlantic to India.

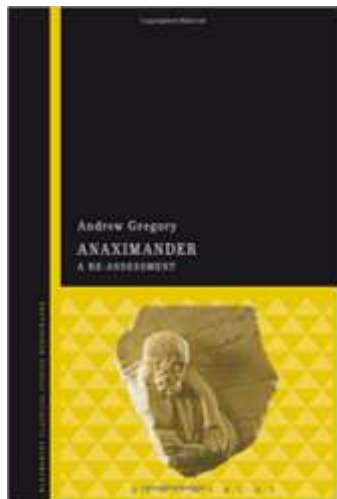
[Galileo and the Conflict between Religion and Science](#), by G.W. Dawes (Routledge), Jan 2016, pp.198 (hardback, £85.00), ISBN 9781138638549



This book contests the idea that scientists and believers can live in harmony. Taking as its starting point the most famous of all conflicts between scientists and the church, the Galileo affair, it argues that religious and scientific communities exhibit very different attitudes to knowledge. Scripturally based religions not only claim a source of knowledge distinct from human reason. They

are also bound by tradition, insist upon the certainty of their beliefs, and are resistant to radical criticism in ways in which the sciences are not.

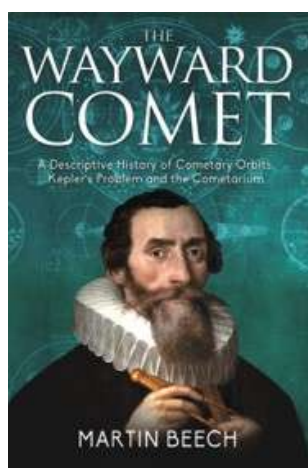
[Anaximander: a re-assessment](#), by A. Gregory (Bloomsbury Academic), Feb 2016, pp.312 (hardback, £65.00), ISBN 9781472507792



Anaximander, the sixth-century BCE philosopher of Miletus, is often credited as being the instigator of both science and philosophy. The first recorded philosopher to posit the idea of the boundless cosmos, he was also the first to attempt to explain the origins of the world and humankind in rational terms. Anaximander's

philosophy encompasses theories of justice, cosmogony, geometry, cosmology, zoology and meteorology. This book draws together these wide-ranging threads into a single, coherent picture of the man, his worldview and his legacy to the history of thought. Arguing that Anaximander's statements are incontrovertible inferences based on observation of the world around him, the work explores how these theories relate to early Greek thought.

[The Wayward Comet - A Descriptive History of Cometary Orbits, Kepler's Problem and the Cometaryum](#), by M. Beech (Universal), Jan 2016, pp.220 (paperback, £18.95), ISBN 9781627340649

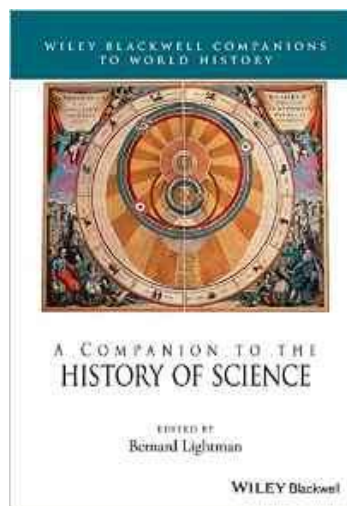


This book discusses the historical struggle to understand, not only the place of comets within a societal context, but also the scientific quest to make their paths amenable to mathematical certitude. The latter narrative is the more technical in content, but it took tactile form with the invention, in 1732, of the cometaryum, a mechanical device to

demonstrate the first two of Kepler's planetary laws. This development was later paralleled, in the mid to late 19th century, by the development of various mechanical devices to help obtain solutions to Kepler's Problem – the problem which asks, exactly where in its orbit is a given comet at some specific set time. The book takes us from the phenomenological

musings of Aristotle, through the exactitude of Newton's gravitational theory and calculus, to the study of comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, by the European Space Agency's Rosetta spacecraft, in the modern era.

[A Companion to the History of Science](#), B. Lightman (ed.) (Wiley-Blackwell), Mar 2016, pp.624 (hardback, £120.00), ISBN 9781118620779



A single volume companion that discusses the history of science as it is done today, providing a survey of the debates and issues that dominate current scholarly discussion, with contributions from leading international scholars.

It provides a single-volume overview of current scholarship in

the history of science edited by one of the leading figures in the field; features forty essays by leading international scholars providing an overview of the key debates and developments in the history of science; and includes discussion of non-Western themes which are integrated throughout the chapters.

The book is divided into four sections based on key analytic categories that reflect new approaches in the field.

[Abandoned in Place: Preserving America's Space History](#), by R. Miller (ed) (University of New Mexico Press), Mar 2016, pp.176 (hardback, £33.05), ISBN 9780826356253



Stencilled on many of the deactivated facilities at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, the evocative phrase 'abandoned in place' indicates the structures that have been

deserted. Some structures, too solid for any known method of demolition, stand empty and unused in the wake of the early period of US space exploration. Now Roland Miller's colour photographs document the NASA, Air Force, and Army facilities across the US that once played a crucial role in the space race.

Rapidly succumbing to the elements and demolition, most of the blockhouses, launch towers, tunnels, test stands, and control rooms featured in *Abandoned in Place* are located at secure military or NASA facilities with little or no public access. Some have been repurposed, but over half of the facilities photographed no longer exist. The haunting images collected here impart artistic insight while preserving an important period in history.

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 TRIP TO PARIS?

As mentioned in the last *SHA e-News*, the recent SHA Annual General Meeting welcomed the idea of organising an SHA trip to the historic Paris Observatory some time during 2016. If this can be arranged, would you be interested? If so, please let the General Secretary, Laura Carroll, know by email: lauracarroll55@hotmail.com

WEB-LINKS NOTICED

Stargazers' Lounge 'History of Astronomy Forum'

The popular Stargazers Lounge website now has a [History of Astronomy Forum](#) where users can swap views and post questions about historical issues in astronomy. This forum has been set up at the suggestion of SHA Librarian, James Dawson.

Already the forum is proving to be a great success and a very useful source of information, photographs, archive links, etc. A simple (free) registration process is required to make use of all the features.

Minute Books of the *Bureau des Longitudes* for the period 1795-1832

This website (in French) brings together the [minutes of the meetings of the French Bureau des longitudes](#), which took place between 1795 and 1932, in the form of 22,000 digital files. The BDL was founded in June 1795 and still exists today. Since its foundation, until 1854, it also governed the Paris Observatory. Its mission was both to improve the determination of longitudes at sea and to be an expert scientific and technical consultative committee to the State. It was specifically charged with calculating ephemerides and with publishing the famous *Connaissance des Temps*.

The files presented are under a [Creative Commons CC-BY-SA 3.0 FR](#) licence. For the period 1795-1853, the digital images of the minutes are available with their transcriptions. The transcription of later documents is currently in progress.



Minutes of the first meeting of the BDL, with the signatures of luminaries such as Lalande, Lagrange, Laplace and Borda (source: as above)

Charles Piazzi Smyth in Tenerife

An interesting seven-minute [video about Charles Piazzi Smyth](#) has been made by the *Museums of Tenerife*. It is dedicated to the memory of the late Mary Brück (a Founder SHA member), who is interviewed at length in the video.

ISIS CB Explore – online History of Science bibliographic database

A new 'open access discovery service for the history of science'. This website provides a [bibliographic search facility](#) built upon 40-years of data in the *Isis Bibliography of the History of Science*.

Centre for the History and Philosophy of Physics

Excellent videos from the sessions at the recent [Medieval Physics in Oxford](#) one-day conference (see last *SHA e-News*) are now available online. Also available are details of forthcoming conferences and videos from interesting previous events – such as *The History of the Sun*, and *Voltaire and the Newtonian Revolution*.

MEET OUR MEMBERS

SHA members introduce themselves and their interests

In this issue: *Bill Barton (Ipswich)*



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

Well, that's more like 'how did the SHA find me?' as I was working with Ken Goward (and more distantly Stuart Williams) before our founding in 2002. Ken was at one time chair of my local astronomical society and we lived only a few miles apart. My home town contained the major agricultural engineering firm *Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies*, and although it was known that they did build telescopes (or more correctly, the mounts) in the nineteenth century, very little detail was known.

Yes, it does meet my needs as it is a great 'place' to exchange historical astronomical information.

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

I like recreating old astronomical experiments to see how our modern results compare with the originals; Also using antique astronomical accessories. My ambition would be to use a 'Browning' prism spectroheliometer.

What got you hooked on that?

When I hold an obviously old object in my hands I like to think, who bought it in the first place? Why did they need it? Who has used it, or owned it, since? This is especially true of an astronomical antique.

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

Up to now, a micrometer eyepiece that seems suspiciously well matched to the Orwell Park Refractor (were they originally made to work together? I guess we'll never know). Especially as it was sold to me by an American interior design company that thought it was the top end of a microscope!

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

I'm an active researcher and currently work in the British Library, Cambridge University Library, Oxford University Library, as well as my local County Record Office. One of my achievements was the discovery that my local astronomical society's observatory was still registered with the IAU due to it being a professional observatory when it was founded over 140 years ago.

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

I think I'd have to say *Starlight Nights: The Adventures of a Star-Gazer* by Leslie C. Peltier.

Why?

I only have it in the 1999 reprint, but I find the illustrations at the beginning of each chapter enchanting. It also talks to me of a simpler time before so much information became so easily available.

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

Hold meetings more frequently, possibly informally, along the lines of the recent 'researchers workshop' or 'local sections'.



SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

We are pleased to welcome SHA member, David Rayment, as the new County Coordinator for Essex. Although the Survey website has an ever-expanding wealth of astronomical history covering most of the UK, many individual counties still do not have a specific coordinator. Would you be prepared to take on a county? It needn't be the one where you live.

Recent additions to the survey include the information provided for the Northumberland page about Frank Acfield (1905-75) and his observatory (the subject of a [memorable Sky at Night episode in 1971](#)).

Also fascinating is the recent information appearing on the London page about the observatory at the Royal Hospital School, Greenwich, which was located at the site now occupied by the National Maritime Museum (see picture below). This was used for pupil tuition at the naval school, before it moved to Holbrook, Suffolk, in the 1930s. The observatory was in operation by 1860, with instruments by Gilbert donated by the Admiralty, which were made for the East India Company's St Helena Observatory. The building in Portland stone was originally fitted with two cylindrical domes but it was later extended with a larger 13-foot one that probably housed the [Lawson Telescope](#), an 11-inch refractor. This telescope, owned by Henry Lawson (1774-1855), was originally offered for the establishment of an observatory in Nottingham, but when the finances failed to materialise it was donated to the Royal Hospital School.



ROGER JONES AWARD

Roger Jones' widow, Sally, has very kindly donated a wonderful model of the Greenwich 'Onion' dome building as a Society award in memory of him. It will, of course be known as the Roger Jones Award.

Council have decided that it will be awarded each year to the member who, in their view, has made outstanding contributions to the SHA Survey. This is especially appropriate in view of Roger's commitment and extended tenure as Founding Survey Coordinator.

SHA PUBLICITY STALLS

We already have volunteers to run SHA stalls at the following events:

The [Institute of Astronomy Open Afternoon](#) on **19 Mar 2016** in Cambridge (Norma Foster, Eric Hutton, Mike & Pat Leggett, Terry Stancliffe and Paul Whiting);

The [South West Astronomy Fair](#) on **13 Aug 2016** at the Norman Lockyer Observatory, Sidmouth, Devon (Carolyn Kennett, John Chuter and Paul Whiting).



SHA publicity stall at the IoA

(photo: Mike Leggett)

Other events at which we might be represented next autumn include the **FAS Convention and AGM**, **Starfest** and **Leeds Astromet** (November), depending on dates and availability of personnel. If you will be at these 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

SHA BULLETIN EDITOR

As members will be aware from Bob Bower's email of 22 April, Dr Clive Davenhall, the long-serving Editor of the SHA Bulletin has stepped down from this role due to pressure of other responsibilities. Clive has very kindly agreed to oversee the publication of the next issue (no. 25), then a new Editor will take over. In response to Bob's email we have already had excellent volunteers. Our aim is to produce two *Bulletins* per

year (Spring and Autumn). Watch this space for further announcements.

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Welcome to Chat #2. I hope to make this a regular contribution. This year's Council is progressing well in their efforts to provide and improve SHA services. The enthusiasm exhibited by attendees at the last Council meeting was a joy to behold. It augurs well for the future of the Society, and I do hope that it will, *inter alia*, result in us gaining more members



Bob Bower, SHA Chairman

I'm very conscious that our members are scattered across the world, and obviously attendance at our meetings and visiting/using the Library are thus not viable for a proportion of us. However, I would urge those of you who are within reasonable travelling distance to consider coming along to our events and using the facilities we offer. We are doing our best to provide what we think you want.

Travel costs are of course always a factor – but where there's a will there's a way – and mine, for the Bath Conference, is to do the 800 mile round trip on my motorbike. It turns out to be cheaper even than the train. Sure, my wife thinks I'm crazy. Sure, I'll need lots of stops to warm up on the way, and sure, I'll need to stay overnight, but even at this late stage it's still possible to find reasonably priced accommodation. I have to admit that, as a Herschel nut, I wouldn't miss it for the world (after all, some of the present Herschel family will be there). Regardless of this, though, the chance to meet others in this wonderful hobby of ours is sufficient excuse. It's still not too late to register for Bath...

Our events programme after Bath is now well defined, as witness elsewhere in this issue. The

possibility of a SHA trip to the Paris Observatory is still being pursued. We do have one contact name for the Observatory staff, as I reported previously, and efforts are underway both by email and, hopefully, personal contact to establish the links that will enable us to progress the matter further. I hope to have more definitive information to report by the next *e-News*.

The 2017 Spring Conference venue is now confirmed as the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge on Sat 22 April. We have yet to appoint an event organiser, but it seems apposite to ask you to consider giving a talk. Please let me know if you are so interested.

Our publications are of course the main service we provide to members who are too far away to attend events (and sensible enough not to attempt two-wheeled travel). You will all be aware of my email call a few weeks ago for volunteers to take over the editorship of the *Bulletin* from Clive Davenhall. I have had responses thereto, and I hope to be able to announce good news in this respect very shortly. We are very grateful to Clive for agreeing to produce *Bulletin* no. 25, which should be out in the near future, and thank him for his many years of contribution as Editor.

I'd like to welcome *Mr Lewis Roger* as a new member who has joined since the last e-News.

As ever, if you have anything you wish to say about the Society, feel free to contact me. If you get the chance, have a look at the [Society website](#). I know that our new online editor John Chuter would welcome any comments thereto.

Finally, could I remind everybody that membership renewals for this year are due by 31 March.

Bob Bower (chairman@shastro.org.uk)

INFORMATION WANTED

Davis Edmondson Benson (1860–1937)

Born and educated in Manchester. Benson was a Civil Engineer, but combined this with an interest in photography and astronomy, plus telescope construction.

He lived most of his life in the seaside town of Southport, Lancashire. He published an article in the *Journal of Liverpool Astronomical Society* c1909-10, which was later expanded into small booklet entitled *The Making of a Speculum* (c1913). This was in print until 1926. He travelled to Spain to observe and photograph the August 1905 total solar eclipse, with both Liverpool A.S. and B.A.A. members. He was

mentioned in the 1905 eclipse report published by B.A.A.

He was the guest speaker of Manchester A.S. in February 1907, lecturing on *The Moon*.

Any additional information on Mr Benson, would be most gratefully received. I would be particularly interested in knowing the location of any copies of the booklet mentioned above.

Gerard Gilligan (gastro@liverpool.ac.uk)
0151-220 8718 (after 6pm please)

OTHER MEETINGS & EXHIBITIONS NOTICED (non-SHA)

Scholar, courtier, magician: the lost library of John Dee

18 January - 29 July 2016 (Monday-Friday only) at the Royal College of Physicians of London, 11 St Andrews Place, Regents Park, London NW1 4LE. From 9am to 5pm.

[A free exhibition exploring the life and legacy of John Dee](#), one of Tudor England's most extraordinary and enigmatic figures.

Mathematician, magician, astronomer, astrologer, imperialist, alchemist and spy, John Dee (1527–1609) continues to fascinate and inspire centuries after he entered the court of Elizabeth I.

The exhibition explores Dee through his personal library. On display for the first time are Dee's mathematical, astronomical and alchemical texts, many elaborately annotated and illustrated by Dee's own hand. Now held in the collections of the Royal College of Physicians, they reveal tantalising glimpses into the 'conjurer's mind'.

BAA Historical Section Conference May 2016

Saturday 21 May 2016, at the Quaker meeting house, 22 School St, Liverpool L1 3BT (10 mins from Liverpool Lime Street Station)

From 10:00 - 17:00, doors open 09:30

Theme: *Observational Astronomy through the ages*. Speakers confirmed to date include:

Gerard Gilligan – *West Kirby to the Moon - the History of Liverpool Astronomical Society*

Kevin Kilburn – *The Bridestones Legacy*

Chris Taylor - *William Herschel and the Expansion of the Universe*

Bob Marriott – *Some Lancashire Emigrants*

Bill Leatherbarrow - *Patrick Moore and our Volcanic Moon*

In 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](#)

The Nature of Time one-day Conference

Saturday 11 June 2016, at St Cross College, University of Oxford. From 10.30-17.00.

[This conference](#) seeks to explore issues related to Time by addressing some perennial questions: whether time exists independently of the Universe (i.e. before the Big Bang), whether time travel is possible (as suggested by the solutions to Einstein's equations of General Relativity), why the irreversible Arrow of Time dominates the macroscopic world whilst being absent from the equations of the microscopic world, and what a clock actually is.

Registration is free, but must be confirmed by Mon 6 Jun using an [online booking form](#).

Worship of the Stars: Celestial Themes in Observance and Practice of the Sacred

25-26 June 2016, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution.

This [Sophia Centre conference](#) will examine the relationship between the sky, the celestial bodies and notions of divinity, religious practice and observance. It is based on an interest in a variety of perspectives, through imagery, myth, anthropology, performance, literary studies and the history of art, and the study of religions.

Birmingham and Midland Institute Heritage Open Day

Saturday 10 September 2016, at the BMI, Birmingham

[Heritage Open Days](#) is England's biggest heritage festival involving 40,000 volunteers. It celebrates the country's history, architecture and culture; offering people the chance to see hidden places and try out new experiences.

Every year on four days in September, the bunting is unfurled and buildings of every age, style and function throw open their doors. It is a once-a-year chance to discover the often hidden or forgotten gems on our doorsteps and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities that bring local history and culture to life. So much to see and do

Admission is free of charge. The BMI is in effect the 'home' of the SHA and generously houses our library, which we hope will also be on show to the public during the open day.

24th SEAC Conference

Monday 12 - Friday 16 September 2016, in Bath.

This conference is organised by the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), whose objectives are to:

- Promote the interdisciplinary study of astronomical practise in its cultural context as a topic of considerable importance within the general study of human societies and their relationship to their environment.

- Promote research seeking to develop our understanding of the cultural significance of astronomical knowledge through the integration of techniques and methods within the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and other disciplines.

For further details, see the [SEAC website](#) and the [conference 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** (Laura Carroll): lauracarroll55@hotmail.com

SUMMARY DATES FOR THE DIARY

2016 MEETINGS

18 Jan-29 Jul *Scholar, courtier, magician: the lost library of John Dee* at the Royal College of Physicians of London, 11 St Andrews Place, Regents Park, London NW1 4LE. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

2 Apr *SHA-Herschel Society Spring Conference* at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

21 May *BAA Historical Section meeting* at the Quaker meeting house, School St, Liverpool L1 3BT. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

9-10 Jun *From Sea to Sky: the Evolution of Air Navigation from the Ocean and Beyond* at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

11Jun *The Nature of Time one-day Conference* at St Cross College, University of Oxford. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

25-26 Jun *Worship of the Stars: Celestial Themes in Observance and Practice of the Sacred.* At the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

2 Jul *SHA Summer Picnic* at Hanwell Community Observatory, near Banbury in North Oxfordshire. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

12-16 Sep *24th SEAC Conference* in Bath. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

29 Oct *SHA Autumn Conference & AGM*, at the BMI in central Birmingham. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*
