



# SHA e-News

*Society for the History of Astronomy*

Volume 8, no.4, October 2016.

Editor: David Sellers

## **HISTORIC OBSERVATORY GOES UNDER THE HAMMER Bidston Observatory: New owners envisage a heritage centre**



*Image: User Rept0n1x at Wikimedia*

The historic Bidston Observatory on the Wirral peninsula was sold at auction in August. The sale of the grade 2 listed building had raised fears for both local and astronomical heritage.

The observatory was built in 1866 and in 1929 its operations were amalgamated with the Tidal Institute under the direction of Joseph Proudman and Arthur Doodson. Until 2004 it was the home of the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory (POL), famed for its studies of tides and sea level changes and its tide predictions for maritime use throughout the world.

The Observatory was sold by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) last year to a property developer, Bidston Observatory Development Limited, for £270,000. This company has now sold the building.

In 2000 the University of Liverpool and NERC issued a joint statement, in which they declared that they would “*try to develop a long-lasting solution that recognises the heritage value of the historic buildings, including the Observatory, that would be vacated on leaving Bidston Hill.*”

Local campaigners had feared, in spite of these undertakings, that sale to a residential developer would effectively destroy the heritage value. Before the sale, Valerie Doodson, from the *Bidston Observatory Preservation Trust* (BOPT) told the *Wirral Globe*: “Bidston Observatory ... is part of Wirral’s heritage and we strongly believe it should be saved as a ‘heritage centre and museum’ for the benefit of all the residents of Wirral.”

As things have turned out, however, [the new owners of the building](#) are not residential developers. Edward Clive, partner Fiona Jones, and Kim Ward are a group of artists who propose to create an arts research centre and a museum, which celebrates the social heritage.

A significant amount of renovation will be needed before the Observatory building can be brought back into use, but the trio hope to open the new arts centre in about two years.

A Radio Merseyside interview video featuring the new owners and panoramic views from the Observatory roof can be viewed [here](#).

## FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

### 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 on *Mary Somerville and the British Grand Amateur Tradition*

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*

Booking in advance at £5 per person for SHA members and £10 per person for non-members.

For more details and pre-registration, please contact

Gerard Gilligan – [ggastro@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:ggastro@liverpool.ac.uk)

### 2017 SPRING CONFERENCE

The Spring Conference for 2017 will take place at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge on Sat. 22 April. Speakers include:

James Hannam (*Medieval Visions of the Heavens*)

Stewart Moore (*Charles Messier*)

Simon Mitton (*The History of Planetary Science*)

Howard Carlton (*John Pringle Nichol*)

Mark Robinson (*George With*)

### 2017 SUMMER PICNIC

The SHA Summer Picnic in 2017 will be on Sat. 1 July at Liverpool World Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool City Centre.

### 2017 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The AGM/Conference for 2017 will be on Sat. 28 October 2017 at the Birmingham & Midland Institute.

## PRESENTATIONS & POSTERS?

If you would like to give a presentation, or exhibit posters relating to your research, at future SHA events

## 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 (& e-News Editor)** David Sellers

**General Secretary** Laura Carroll

**Treasurer** Geoff King

**Membership Secretary** Gerard Gilligan

**Editors, SHA Bulletin** Carolyn Kennett/ Len Adam

**Publicity Officer** Mike Leggett

**Survey Coordinator** Kevin Johnson

**Online Editor** John Chuter

**Librarian** James Dawson

### 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:

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.

please contact the [General Secretary](#) in the first instance.

## CORRECTION – Chaldean Society

The last issue of SHA e-News, referring to the forthcoming lecture by Bill Barton at the 2016 Autumn Conference, inadvertently stated that the *Chaldean Society* was an Ipswich organisation. This is not correct. In fact, the organisation was a national one, founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though the Society had its own Journal, *The Chaldean*, very little seems to have been published about its story. We are looking forward to Bill casting further light on its members and their activities.

## SHA PUBLICATIONS

### SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early January 2017. 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](#).

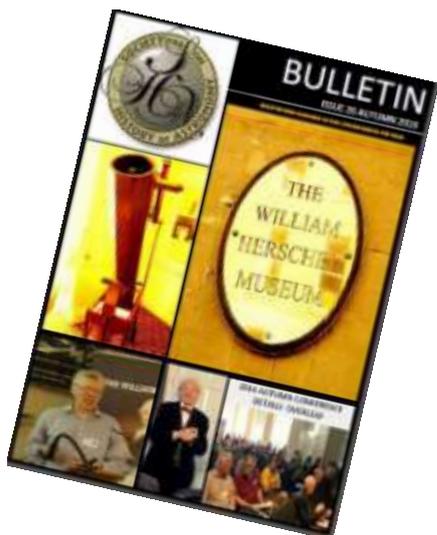


Back issues and guidelines for contributions are available from the [e-News web page](#).

### SHA BULLETIN

All members should have received issue 25 of the *Bulletin* in the first week of August 2016.

Hot on its heels, members should also have received the 'new look' issue 26 at the end of September.



Issue 27 is expected to be published on 1 April 2017.

Contributions to the *Bulletin* are most welcome, including letters which can be on any aspect of the Society or the history of astronomy. The deadlines for copy are: issue 27 (1 Feb 2017); issue 28 (1 Aug 2017)

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

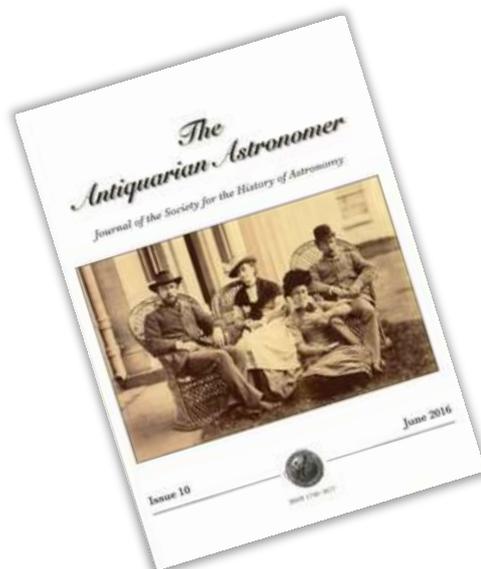
It is usually prudent to check with the Editors before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book reviews). Back issues of the *Bulletin* (and its predecessor: *SHA Newsletter*) are now indexed on the Abstract service of SAO/ NASA. Enter "SHAN" as the 'Journal Code' at

[http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib\\_abs.html](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 10 was posted to members in early June 2016. The next issue is due in the Summer of 2017.



Issue 10 contains the following papers:

*A special centennial: Mercury, Vulcan, and an early triumph for General Relativity* (William Sheehan and Tony Misch);

*Entente céleste: David Gill, Ernest Mouchez, and the Cape and Paris Observatories 1878-92* (Paul A. Haley);

*William Gascoigne, Richard Towneley, and the micrometer* (Joe LaCour and David Sellers); and,

*Sketching the Moon: crater drawings by Samuel Wilfrid Russell (1895-1965)* (Louise E.Devoy and Agathe Daronnat).

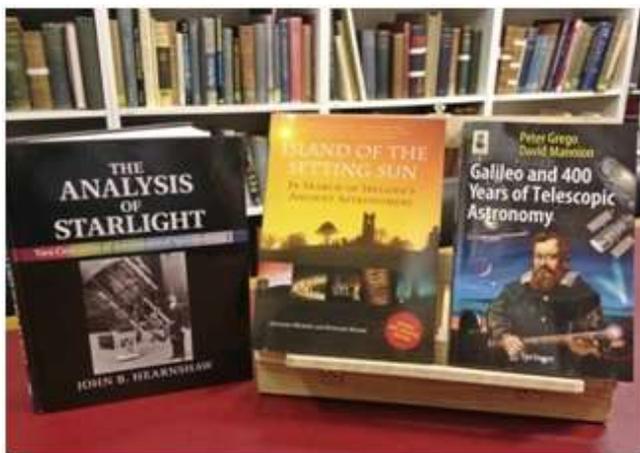
Note: the first six issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* have been online at NASA's ADS service since the start of 2015. Type "antas" into the box at the top marked Journal Name/Code on this page

[http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib\\_abs.html](http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html)

Members and others wishing to submit material for future issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* should contact Ian Ridpath (Editor) at [ian@ianridpath.com](mailto: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



Some new additions (imaged above):

- Hearnshaw, John B. *The Analysis of Starlight: Two Centuries of Astronomical Spectroscopy* (2014)
- Murphy, Anthony. *Island of the Setting Sun: In Search of Ireland's Ancient Astronomers* (2008)
- Grego, Peter. *Galileo and 400 Years of Telescopic Astronomy* (2010)

Some recent donations [donor in square brackets]:

- Marston, Paul. *Great Astronomers in European History* (2014)
- Wali, Kameshwar. S Chandrasekhar: *The Man Behind the Legend* (1997) [James Dawson]

A list of forthcoming dates the library will be open:

Mon 17 Oct  
Thu 27 Oct  
Thu 10 Nov  
Wed 23 Nov  
Thu 8 Dec

The library is scheduled to be open between 10am and 3pm on these dates (though invariably it is open between 9am and 6pm), but please do contact the library in advance of a visit.

An updated version of the catalogue is due to be released to members imminently and will be available on the library page of the Society website and the link emailed to all members.

If you want to know more about the library or its stock, or if you'd like help with your research or finding a book or article, or other library-related matter, please do contact James and Carolyn who would love to hear from you: [library@shastro.org.uk](mailto:library@shastro.org.uk)

Non-members are welcome to visit, but only members may borrow books.

## SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA Small Research Grants are available for the period **1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017** and applications are solicited. The total amount allocated by the Council for this round is £1500. These grants are made available to provide limited financial support for members' research.

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.

## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY – Thank you

Throughout June and July this year we ran an online survey asking SHA members to appraise and feedback to us on the various components of the Society: the [SHA's website](#); [e-News](#); The [Antiquarian Astronomer](#); the [Bulletin](#); the [Survey website](#); the [library](#) in Birmingham; the running and administration of the SHA; and the SHA's meetings. Additionally we asked about how you'd heard about the SHA before joining, and what other groups or societies you belonged to. We also sought comments on how the society could potentially be improved.

We are overjoyed to report that the 2016 Membership Survey received responses from about half of the membership. As such we are confident that the responses we've received are a good representation of the views and opinions held by the members.

The aspects of the Society which members scored highest were the *Antiquarian Astronomer*, the *Bulletin*, *e-News*, the running and administration of the Society, and the SHA meetings, with all of these components scoring 9 out of 10. The remaining domains scored 8 out of 10, these being the SHA website, the Survey website, and the library in Birmingham.

Each question in the survey also allowed members to enter free text comments, and again we have been bowled over by the material this has given us. We have received nearly 12,000 words of comment and are still working through these. A sub-group of the SHA's Council will be looking at these comments in more detail, as well as looking at wider issues related to recruitment and retention of members.

So thank you everyone who took the time to complete the survey. The results have helped us already and the ongoing analysis is likely to continue to give us ideas to explore and consider. We really do want to make the SHA a society which listens to its members and would encourage you to contact us if you have ideas or concerns. All of the Council members and co-opted officers can be contacted via email from this page of the [website](#).

*James Dawson, SHA Librarian and 2016 Membership Survey Co-ordinator.*

## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY Prize Draw Winner

Everyone who completed the survey was given the opportunity to enter a free prize draw. At the SHA Council Meeting on Saturday 3rd September 2016 the winner was drawn at random. **Patrick Kiernan** has won a year's free membership of the SHA. Congratulations Patrick.

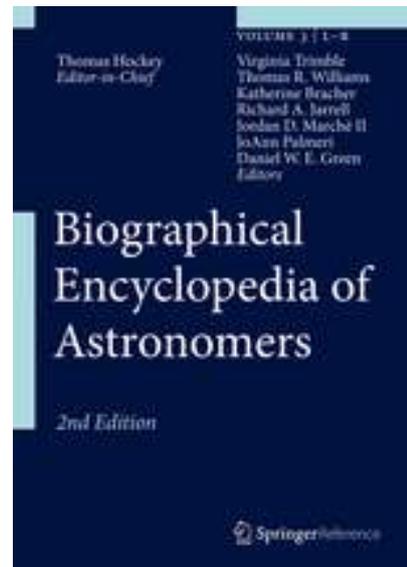
## DONALD E OSTERBROCK BOOK PRIZE 2017

It has been announced that the 2017 Donald E. Osterbrock Book Prize will be awarded to the [Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers](#) (ed. Thomas Hockey, published by Springer). Amongst the book's contributing authors are many SHA members. Congratulations to all of them on this well-deserved recognition of a fine piece of work.

The Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society awards the prize biennially to the author(s) of a book judged to advance the field of the history of astronomy or to bring history of astronomy to light.

The award was originated by HAD in 2009 and was named in memory of Donald E. Osterbrock in 2010. Osterbrock was a long-time HAD member, and the

recipient of HAD's highest honour, the LeRoy E. Doggett Prize for Historical Astronomy, in 2002.



The *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers* (in our Library) is a valuable resource for historians and astronomers alike. It includes approximately 1850 biographical sketches on astronomers from antiquity to modern times. It is the collective work of 430 authors edited by an editorial board of 8 historians and astronomers. This reference provides biographical information on astronomers and cosmologists by utilizing contemporary historical scholarship.

## MEMBERS' REGISTER OF INTERESTS

Some members, upon joining the SHA, will have included on the application form a list of their particular interest areas in the History of Astronomy. Such interests are not static, however, and our records could well be out of date. The Council invites you to let the General Secretary have an up to date list.

The SHA will not publish this information. Nor will it circulate a general list to members or others. If one member (A), researching a particular topic, wishes to contact others researching in the same area, then the SHA may put (A) in touch with (B), but only if (B) agrees to this on a case by case basis.

Submission of this information is entirely at your discretion. If you do not want to put your interests on record, that is perfectly OK. If, however, you do let the SHA have a list of your interests, please let us know whether you are happy for the SHA to approach you, in the event that another member seeks contact with co-researchers.

## MYSTERY MAN IN THE SHA LIBRARY IDENTIFIED

You might recall we asked for *SHA e-News* readers' help to identify an unknown gentleman who appeared in a framed photo in the SHA Library [*e-News* 8(3) July 2016]. We are pleased to report that the mystery has been solved. Within hours of the *e-News* being distributed I received an email from Peter Gill of Eastbourne asking if the framed photograph had come from Gilbert Satterthwaite; Peter had a vague recollection of seeing the picture at Gilbert's home. Peter thought the gentleman was most likely AF O'D Alexander, Gilbert's mentor. After unsuccessfully hunting for other images online to verify the identity I emailed Richard Baum, who quickly replied with a reference to an article from 2006; fortuitously Richard had written an article for the JBAA which included an image of Dr AF O'D Alexander (JBAA 2006; 116(4): 190-195). I think you'll agree the likeness is remarkable and connection between Alexander and Gilbert Satterthwaite clinches the association.

Dr Alexander's doctorate was awarded in 1932 for his thesis on the Franco-British war of 1377, though as an amateur astronomer he is best remembered for his contribution to planetary astronomy. Amongst his publications were two books on planetary astronomy, both of which we have copies of in the SHA's Library (*The Planet Saturn* (1962) and *The Planet Uranus* (1965)).

Thank you Peter and Richard for helping to solve the mystery and for allowing us to learn a little about another fascinating character from the history of amateur astronomy.

*James Dawson*

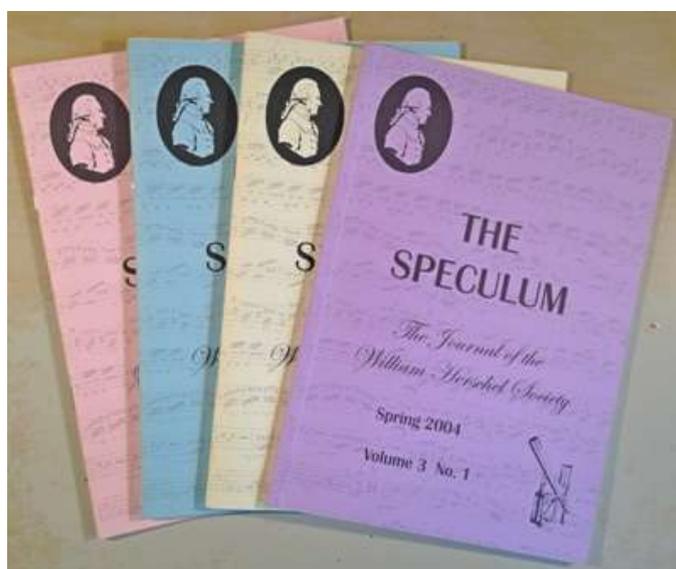


**Arthur Francis O'Donel Alexander (1896-1971)**

[right hand image: by Ben Burrell, courtesy Richard McKim and the BAA]

## CAN YOU HELP THE LIBRARY...AGAIN?

We are trying to fill some gaps in the journals we keep. We are missing all of volume 1 (2001) from *The Speculum*, the journal of the William Herschel Society. There were three editions published in volume 1, though only two editions in subsequent years. If anyone has the three copies from volume 1 which they would be happy to donate to the SHA's Library please get in touch with either James Dawson or Carolyn Bedwell. We also only have photocopies of volume 8(1) and volume 9(2) so would also ideally like original booklet versions of these. Thank you.



## SHA TO AFFILIATE TO WILLIAM HERSCHEL SOCIETY

At its September meeting the Council decided to affiliate the SHA to the [William Herschel Society](#), with which we recently held to highly successful joint meeting in Bath.

## DISCOUNT FOR SHA MEMBERS



SHA members are now entitled to 20% discounts from OUP when ordering through the [OUP website](#). At the checkout there is an option to enter a promotion code which will apply a 20% discount. To obtain the code please contact [James Dawson](#)

## SHA SUPPORTS MARY ADELA BLAGG EXHIBITION

The September 2016 Council Meeting of the SHA agreed to give a £250 donation to assist the Cheadle Discovery Group in preparing an exhibition about the life and work of [Mary Adela Blagg, FRAS](#) (1858-1944). The timing of the exhibition will coincide with the centenary of Mary's election to Fellowship of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS). Mary was a selenographer and made contributions to early IAU publications of named lunar features. She also did work on the analysis of variable star observations, which brought her international recognition, and was one of the first women to be admitted to the RAS. Following her death a lunar crater was named after her.

Mary's important work in astronomy deserves to be better known and should be an inspiration for other women to become involved in science.

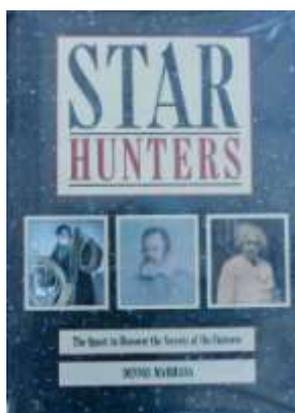
The [Cheadle Discovery Group](#) is a charity which operates a small heritage centre in the High St, Cheadle, Staffordshire. Its main aim is to advance the education of residents and visitors and to promote their interest in the history and heritage of Cheadle, Staffordshire, and the surrounding area.

It is intended that the Mary A. Blagg exhibition will run from the 15 October 2016 until the year end.

## LIBRARIAN'S CHOICE

*Star Hunters: The Quest to Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Dennis Mammana, hardcover (1990), [978-0894718755](tel:978-0894718755)

I stumbled on this book whilst sorting through a pile of over-sized books in the SHA Library. I spent a few minutes leafing through the pages and reading bits of text. I immediately realised this was a great account of the history of astronomy, from the dawn of mankind to 1990 (when the book was published and when the Hubble Space Telescope was launched). The book won't appeal to academics, but neither is it a children's book—I suspect it is aimed at the adult reader who knows a little and who wants to learn more. The images and illustrations are big and plentiful and the author gives a very balanced account of mankind's



endeavours, and failures, at understanding the Universe. All of the commoner names in the history of astronomy are mentioned, as well as several new ones for me. At nearly 15 inches in height, this isn't an easy book to hold and read in bed, but it really is a well presented and useful resource to anyone new to the history of astronomy or who is after an easy reading account of the subject. Second-hand copies can be found for between £5-10 online and I'm happy to help anyone who wants to track down a copy.

*James Dawson*  
SHA Librarian

## PARIS OBSERVATORY VISIT

As pre-announced in the April *e-News*, a trip has been organised for SHA members to visit the Paris Observatory in 2017. This has been kindly arranged by Dr David Valls-Gabaud of the Observatory after discussion with SHA member, Barrie Chacksfield, at the FAS meeting in Birmingham last October.

Subject to final confirmation, the dates are from Friday 7th to Saturday 8th April 2017. A meeting room has been booked for all day Friday at the Observatory with a planned tour of the Observatory in the afternoon. On Saturday morning David—a member of the Organising Committee of the IAU History of Astronomy Commission—will open the Observatory at Meudon.

SHA General Secretary, Laura Carroll, has the list of members who have expressed an interest in going so far. If any other member is interested please let Laura know no later than the date of the October AGM meeting. Barrie will be attending the AGM, hopefully with confirmation of the final arrangement. For security reasons the Paris Observatory requires full details of all those intending to visit well in advance. Members will be required to make their own transport and accommodation arrangements but final numbers are known, Barrie will look for some local hotels. David has also offered to help with this.

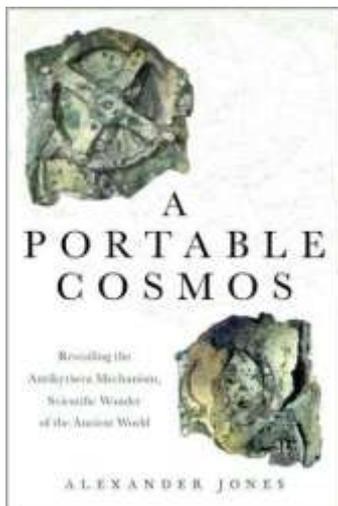


**Paris Observatory**

(image: Emmanuel Cordisco/Wikimedia)

## FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

[\*\*A Portable Cosmos: Revealing the Antikythera Mechanism, Scientific Wonder of the Ancient World\*\*](#), Alexander Jones (OUP), Mar 2017, pp.320 (hardback, £22.99), ISBN 9780199739349



This book aims to be an approachable, accurate, well-illustrated explanation of what the Antikythera Mechanism was, what it did, and how it worked, according to the most recent research

It presents a new account of the discovery and early study of the Mechanism, based on archival sources

It includes discussion of the most important

open questions, such as where and when was it made? what was its purpose? how accurate was it?

The Mechanism's connections to ancient Greek and Babylonian astronomy, astrology, and physical thought and to ancient society, are illustrated through a wide selection of objects as well as translations of texts

[\*\*William Herschel: His Astronomical Research and Legacy\*\*](#), by Clifford Cunningham (ed.) (Springer), Mar 2017, pp.405 (hardback, £86.00), ISBN 9783319328256

This book presents a modern scholarly analysis of issues associated with William Herschel. Some of the world's leading experts on Herschel, discoverer of the planet Uranus, here offer their combined wisdom on many aspects of his life and astronomical research. Solar system topics include: comets, the Earth's Moon, and the spurious moons of Uranus, all objects whose observation was pioneered by Herschel.

The contributors examine his study of the structure of the Milky Way and an in-depth look at the development of the front view telescopes he built. The popular subject of extraterrestrial life is looked at from the point of view of both William Herschel and his son John, both of whom had an interest in the topic. William's personal development through the educational system of the late eighteenth-century is also explored, and the wide range of verse and satire in various languages associated with his discoveries is collected here for the first time. Herschel worked at a time of incredible discovery, and his work is still

highly regarded in the field. Here it is given a thorough investigation which puts his career into context and perspective.

[\*\*A Saving Science: Capturing the Heavens in Carolingian Manuscripts\*\*](#), by Eric M. Ramírez-Weaver (Penn State University Press), Dec 2016, pp.312 (hardback, £63.95), ISBN 9780271071268

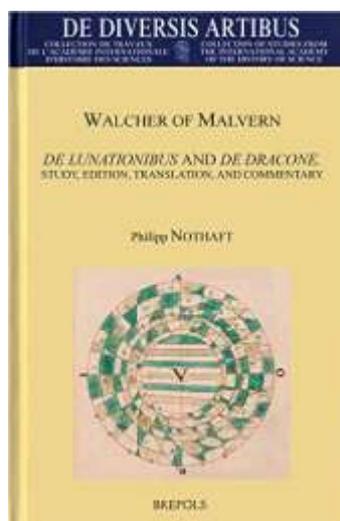


In this book, Eric Ramírez-Weaver explores the significance of early medieval astronomy in the Frankish empire, using as his lens an astronomical masterpiece, the deluxe manuscript of the Handbook of 809, painted in roughly 830

for Bishop Drogo of Metz, one of Charlemagne's sons. Created in an age in which careful study of the heavens served a liturgical purpose—to reckon Christian feast days and seasons accurately and thus reflect a 'heavenly' order—the diagrams of celestial bodies in the Handbook of 809 are extraordinary signifiers of the intersection of Christian art and classical astronomy.

Ramírez-Weaver shows how, by studying this lavishly painted and carefully executed manuscript, we gain a unique understanding of early medieval astronomy and its cultural significance. In a time when the Frankish church sought to renew society through education, the Handbook of 809 presented a model in which study aided the spiritual reform of the cleric's soul, and, by extension, enabled the spiritual care of his community.

[\*\*Walcher of Malvern: De lunationibus and De Dracone - Study, Edition, Translation, and Commentary\*\*](#), P.Nothaft (ed) (Brepols), Dec 2016, pp.350 (hardback, £80.27), ISBN 978-2-503-56876-8

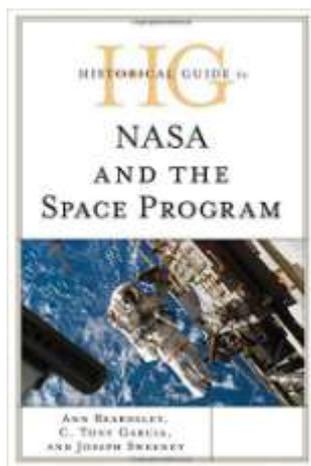


This volume contains the first complete edition and study of the works of Walcher of Malvern, a key figure in Latin astronomy around 1100

Walcher, the prior of Great Malvern in Worcestershire (d. 1135), is a landmark figure in the history of medieval science, whose work brought the Latin computistical

tradition to its apex while foreshadowing the twelfth-century Renaissance in mathematical astronomy. His most famous achievement is the observation of a lunar eclipse in 1092 with the aid of an astrolabe, which is the first of its kind to be recorded in a Latin source. In spite of his renown, Walcher's writings have never received any close scrutiny and the precise rationale and modalities behind his observations and calculations remain ill-understood. This volume contains the first complete edition of Walcher's two known treatises (*De lunationibus* and *De Dracone*), together with an English translation and a detailed commentary. An introductory study elucidates the background to his scientific pursuits and situates them in the intellectual and disciplinary context of the late-eleventh and early-twelfth century, when Latin astronomy underwent a transformative period of lasting significance.

**[Historical Guide to NASA and the Space Program](#)**, by Ann Beardsley, C. Tony Garcia, and Joseph Sweeney (Rowman & Littlefield), Sep 2016, pp.422 (hardback, £75.00), ISBN 9781442262867

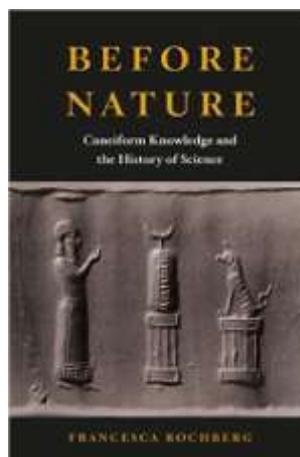


NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration created in the wake of the Space Act—continues to accomplish the precepts of the Act every day. With many hundreds of satellites launched into space and close to 200 human spaceflights, NASA is a proven leader in space exploration. Most of the US space

exploration efforts have been led by NASA, including the Apollo moon-landing missions, the Skylab space station, and later the Space Shuttle. Currently, NASA is supporting the International Space Station and is overseeing the development of the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle, the Space Launch System and Commercial Crew vehicles. NASA is also responsible for the Launch Services Program which provides oversight of launch operations and countdown management for unmanned NASA launches.

The *Historical Guide to NASA and the Space Program* contains a chronology, an introduction, appendixes, and an extensive bibliography. The dictionary section has over 500 cross-referenced entries on space missions, astronauts, technical terms, space shuttles, satellites and the international space station. This book is an excellent access point for students, researchers, and anyone wanting to know more about NASA and space exploration..

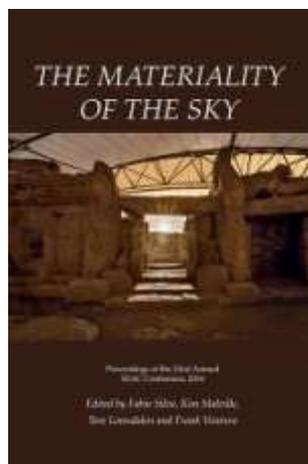
**[Before Nature: Cuneiform Knowledge and the History of Science](#)**, by Francesca Rochberg (University of Chicago Press), Nov 2016, pp.392 (hardback, £38.50), ISBN 9780226406138



In the modern West, we take for granted that what we call the “natural world” confronts us all and always has—but this book explores that time when there was no such conception of “nature”—no word, reference, or sense for it.

Before the concept of nature formed over the long history of European philosophy and science, our ancestors in ancient Assyria and Babylonia developed an inquiry into the world in a way that is kindred to our modern science. With *Before Nature*, Francesca Rochberg explores that Assyro-Babylonian knowledge tradition and shows how it relates to the entire history of science. From a modern, Western perspective, a world not conceived somehow within the framework of physical nature is difficult—if not impossible—to imagine. Yet, as Rochberg lays out, ancient investigations of regularity and irregularity, norms and anomalies clearly established an axis of knowledge between the knower and an intelligible, ordered world. Rochberg makes a case for how exactly we can understand cuneiform knowledge, observation, prediction, and explanation in relation to science—without recourse to later ideas of nature.

**[The Materiality of the Sky](#)**, by Fabio Silva, Kim Malville, Tore Lomsdalen and Frank Ventura (eds), Sep 2016, pp.362 (Kindle only, £35.00), ISBN 9781907767098



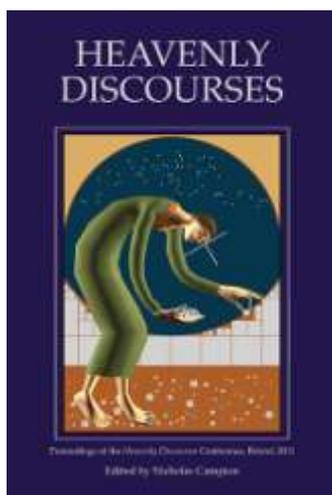
The Proceedings of the 22nd Annual SEAC Conference 2014, Malta. From the earliest times, human beings have been driven by the basic needs to procure food and water, shelter and defence, and communication with other members of the group. The skyscape was different from these, as it was beyond the reach of people and could not be

manipulated. Yet, the innate imagination of human beings could not be unmoved by the sun and the moon, which dominate the day and night and apparently

move in a well-ordered fashion, and the stars, which provide a splendid canopy on clear dark nights. Although celestial objects could not be handled and exploited in a tangible manner, people's creativity sought to understand them, to find some use for them in relation to one's needs and activities and to generate ideas about their nature and their meaning for humanity.

In addition, concepts, patterns, myths and other creations of this intangible culture could be transformed into material culture, including iconography, calendars, structural orientations and other human creations. These manifestations constitute the materiality of the sky and bear witness to human beings' interest in the sky. The chapters in this volume illustrate the variety of research activity generated in this field of study across a broad spectrum of ages, cultures, and geographical regions.

[Heavenly Discourses](#), by Nicholas Campion (ed) (Sophia Press Centre), Sep 2016, pp.410 (paperback, £40.00), ISBN 9781907767074



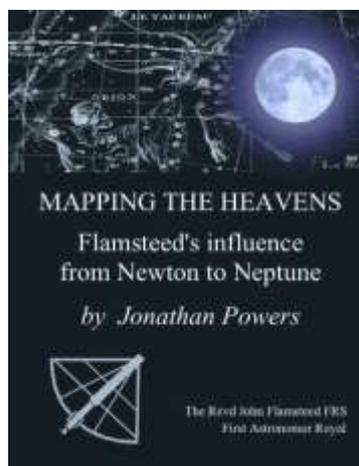
Proceedings of the 2011 *Heavenly Discourses: Myth, Astronomy and Culture* conference, Bristol, UK

Life on Earth would not exist without the brilliant objects we see in it; we would not be here without the light and heat of the Sun, and the rhythmic, tidal, biologically-vital, influences of the Moon.

From earliest recorded history and in all societies the stars and planets, indeed the entire sky, have been a source of meaning for human affairs. In many cultures the heavenly bodies speak to humanity and, often, humanity talks back. Sometimes the stars speak for themselves as divine entities. In much western art and literature they become metaphors, underpinning narratives—and discourses—which explore or dramatise the human condition, as in the epic narratives of modern, cinematic science fiction. And for millennia human beings have imagined a journey to the heavens. This dream finally became a reality on 12 April 1961 when Yuri Gagarin made his single, historic orbit of the Earth. This date inaugurated the period of human space travel, and has a claim to be one of the most significant moments of human history.

## BOOKS MISSED

[Mapping the Heavens: Flamsteed's Influence, from Newton to Neptune](#), by Jonathan Powers (iOpening Books, for Derby Museums), 2014, pp.47 (paperback, £4.50), ISBN 9780954577988



John Flamsteed (1646-1719) was the first Astronomer Royal. He came from Derby though he was born in nearby Denby. Originally he argued that the Prime Meridian should be drawn through Derby, since it was 'in the navel of the Kingdom'. This mini-monograph shows the position of the

proposed Meridiam Derbiensis, explains some of the challenges of observational astronomy, and provides diagrams of the instruments he constructed.

His relationship with his contemporary, the imperious Isaac Newton, became very difficult, but nonetheless Flamsteed's observations provided vital data for Newton's greatest work. Remarkably Flamsteed's original observations were still of importance and interest in the mid 19th century, when it was realised that he had unwittingly observed the planet Uranus four times before it was officially 'discovered' by William Herschel in 1781. This mini-monograph explains how the apparently uncharacteristic inaccuracy of these observations by Flamsteed provided clues which led to discovery of Neptune.

These 'Enlightenment Mini-Monographs' have been specially written and published for the benefit of the Derby Museum and Art Gallery, and other regional cultural charities. The author is Professor Emeritus Jonathan Powers DL DUniv, the first Academic Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Derby. These little books all contain some new and original material not to be found elsewhere.

**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.*

## WEB-LINKS NOTICED

### Journal of Astronomy in Culture

June 2016 saw the launch of the first issue (vol.1, issue 1) of the new peer-reviewed, open-access [Journal of Astronomy in Culture](#). This is published by the [International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture](#) (ISAAC).



The Journal is stated to be devoted to publishing academic investigations into the operation of astronomies and the cultures, societies and ideologies that supported them. Relevant subject matter to the journal ranges from the earliest times to the present and covers any geographical region. Studies may incorporate methodological approaches from anthropology, archaeology, archaeoastronomy, history, indigenous studies and science & technology studies.

### Marcia Bartusiak on Black Holes

MIT professor of science writing Marcia Bartusiak [discusses the contentious history of the black hole](#). This video-recorded lecture is based on her latest book *Black Hole: How an idea abandoned by Newtonians, hated by Einstein and gambled on by Hawking became loved*. She recounts scientists' frustrating, exhilarating, and at times humorous battles over the acceptance of one of astronomy's most dazzling ideas.

This web page provides a link to a rich collection of previous lectures from the annual [NEAF Space & Astronomy conference](#) which is held just outside of New York City at the RCC campus of the State University of NY. The Northeast Astronomy Forum is in its 25th year and is a world renowned symposium which annually searches the globe for the most relevant personalities who are making space, science and astronomy history today. Now through NEAF

Talks online, these lectures are available free of charge.

### Cosmic Quest

The 30-part BBC Radio 4 series on the history of astronomy, [Cosmic Quest](#), presented by Heather Couper is available on the BBC's listen again website.

### Scientific Instrument Commission

The Scientific Instrument Commission (SIC), which encourages and promotes scholarly research on the history of scientific instruments, has a new website under construction. The draft version can be seen at <http://zenury.net/sic/> (the final version will be at [www.scientific-instrument-commission.org](http://www.scientific-instrument-commission.org)). The SIC encourages preservation and documentation of collections of instruments and their use within the wider discipline of the history of science. To promote interest in the history of instruments the SIC holds annual symposia in different parts of the world, usually where there are important collections of instruments or centres of research and teaching.

### Adler Planetarium Collections webpage and research tools

The Webster Institute for the History of Astronomy cares for, studies, and interprets the Adler collections. The Adler boasts one of the largest and most significant collections of historic scientific instruments in the world. In addition, the collections include rare and modern books, works on paper, photography, paintings, models, and archives. Images of many of these instruments and documents can now be searched via an [excellent website](#).

The Webster Institute is currently working on a celestial cartography digitization project, part of the Collections Access Initiative to bring Adler collections to the broadest possible audience. Through 2017, staff will digitize and create metadata for approximately 6000 celestial maps. The project includes more than 227 rare books and atlases, containing over 1,000 star charts; 97 works on paper; 58 objects from the scientific instrument collection; and the Carte du Ciel collection of approximately 3,750 prints. Dating from the fifteenth through twentieth centuries, the Adler's celestial cartography focuses on European astronomy, but also includes significant examples from China and the Islamic world. The images will be available online in the [Adler Collections Catalog](#).

## MEET OUR MEMBERS

### SHA members introduce themselves and their interests

In this issue: *Carolyn Kennett (Helston, Cornwall)*



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

I found the SHA through its listing in the RAS diary. I enjoy researching the history of astronomy so it seemed a natural step for me to join. I have found the society an excellent platform for me to meet like minded people and to read current research on the subject.

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

I have a two main interests the first one being maritime astronomy and the second being archaeoastronomy.

#### What got you hooked on these?

I live in Cornwall surrounded by the sea and am very aware of the role that astronomers played in maritime history. I'm often left in awe at the dangerous and compromising work that was undertaken by astronomers to make a mariner's life safer.

I worked many years ago for the heritage department of the Office of Public Works in Ireland, I was taken to a large number of Irish megalithic monuments and this left me with an interest in this part of history. Cornwall has a high density of ancient monuments too and it seemed like a great idea to research these with astronomy in mind.

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

That I live in area rich in astronomy history. From the earliest times and the alignments of megalithic monuments to learning about the research undertaken by Georgian through to Victorian astronomers here in the South West, it all enthuses me.

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

Last year I undertook updating the SHA County survey for Cornwall. So I spent large amount of time actively researching at the records office, local libraries and on the internet and was far more armchair based.

This year I have undertaken a project at Boscawen-Un stone circle in West Penwith. Rock art has been discovered here with a possible solar alignment, so I've been out in the field taking measurements. I hope to find out if there is any astronomical purpose behind the design of the stone circle.

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

This is such a difficult question to answer. I did consider answering my kindle but that did seem to be a bit of a cheat. Therefore as the choice is so hard I would grab (for sentimental value) the first ever astronomy book that I owned and that is Patrick Moore's *Stargazing: Astronomy without a telescope*.

#### Why?

Within the book were four glow-in-the-dark star sheets, which as a child I was fascinated with. I can remember that I would pretend to be asleep and then sneak up later to gaze out of my bedroom window, trying to work my way round the night sky with them. I think "glow-in-the-dark" was in its infancy as I remember the "glow" didn't work too well and I would often need to reach for a torch, hindering my ability to see the stars outside!

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

I think the SHA does a great job with its meetings and publications. But going forward I would like to see an online forum which would enable all the members to engage with each other, no matter where they lived.

## SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

The Survey Coordinator (Kevin Johnson) has sent requests to 200 local astronomical societies, asking for any information which they have about their history. So far, about 30 responses have been received and Kevin is busy uploading the resulting information onto the Survey website. In some instances—for example Liverpool AS—detailed histories have been added as PDF files.

## SHA ON THE ROAD

The SHA had a successful stall at the **North-West Astronomy Festival** (1-3 Jul 2016, Runcorn), at which Gerard Gilligan kindly represented us.



**Gerard on the SHA stall at NW Astronomy Festival**

The Society also had a very busy stall at the **South West Astrofair** (13 Aug 2016, Norman Lockyer Observatory, Devon) at which John Chuter, Carolyn Kennett, Tom Weidner and Paul Whiting helped. Five new members were signed up. The NLO is a large site located on the hilltop overlooking Sidmouth on the south coast. It houses a number of historic telescopes within its numerous domes. It has a large lecture theatre and the planetarium (which was previously housed at Greenwich before they updated theirs).

The site is used by a very active group of volunteers who run sections covering many aspects of amateur astronomy. It is a beautiful site and well worth a visit.



**The SHA stall and volunteers at the NLO**

Volunteers have offered to assist at other events in 2016 as follows:

**International Astronomy Show** (14-15 Oct 2016, Leamington Spa): James Dawson, Len Adams, Geoff King, Mike Leggett (tbc)

**FAS Convention** (22 Oct 2016, Birmingham): James Dawson, Mike & Pat Leggett

**Leeds Astromet** (12 Nov 2016, Leeds): Gerard Gilligan (tbc)

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, please contact the Publicity Officer, Mike Leggett: [leggett189@btinternet.com](mailto:leggett189@btinternet.com)

If you would like to use SHA leaflets at an event, or know of a useful place to leave them, please contact Mike.

## OTHER PUBLICITY

The SHA featured in the Grassroots section of *Astronomy Now* magazine (Sep 2016 issue) with a report of our Summer Picnic at Hanwell Castle. The SHA stall at the NW Astronomy Festival and the programme of our Autumn Conference were also mentioned.

An article about the SHA (written by James Dawson) appears in the latest *Newsletter of the Birmingham & Midland Institute*.

The Autumn Conference Flier and an SHA Application Form were enclosed with the August 2016 issue of the *BAA Journal*.

## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

So many things are happening within the Society at the moment that it's difficult to know where to start. At the risk of emulating a worn record, I really do feel the need to re-iterate just how palpable the feeling of enthusiasm and energy is within Council. New initiatives and ideas abound.



**Bob Bower, SHA Chairman**

Most of you (certainly the UK members) will have received *Bulletin* no.26 by now.

First of all, I would like to thank our two new co-editors for their efforts. To go from ground zero to a fully-fledged issue in just a few months is impressive in anybody's book. I first met Carolyn and Len in Bath the day before this year's Spring Conference, shortly after they volunteered for the job. It was obvious that they were both full of enthusiasm for their task. They committed at the outset to a regular issue schedule. Henceforth the *Bulletin* will be published at the beginning of October and April—which is why this issue follows hot on the heels of no.25. You will notice a change in the magazine's style. Council were very impressed by Carolyn and Len's plans in this respect, which were presented to us just a few scant weeks after they started work—and we trust you will be too. They are already hard at work on *Bulletin* no.27. I would encourage you all to submit articles for their consideration.

You will find an update on the Membership Survey by James Dawson elsewhere in this *e-News*. The normal expectation for most surveys is around a 10% response. It is staggering that over half of you have replied. This gives us a huge database of opinion to enable us to fine-tune the services that you desire from the Society. Council are still digesting all the

information you have provided, but we have already convened a sub-committee to look specifically at ways of increasing our membership, chaired by Gerard Gilligan. I'm pleased to see that we have had a significant influx of new members in the past few months. We are thinking of ways to improve both our website and library services, courtesy of John Chuter and James Dawson respectively.

Our events programme for next year is now well defined, as described elsewhere herein. We have the firm prospect of an extra event in 2017. A visit to the Paris Observatory now has a date, too—Friday 7<sup>th</sup> Apr. Barrie Chacksfield has kindly agreed to be the main point of contact on this. It looks though the *Société Astronomique de France* might be participants too, and it may be possible to arrange for other activities also.

Finally, I look forward to seeing as many of you that can make it to the Autumn Conference. Gerard tells me that we have over 40 attendees registered for the event at the time of writing (early Sept). Now if we could make it over 50 that would be great. 60 or more, and I'd be over the Moon.....

Bob Bower ([chairman@shastro.org.uk](mailto:chairman@shastro.org.uk))

## INFORMATION WANTED

### Help to locate the notebooks of Sir Robert Ball (1840-1913)

We have received this email from Sarah Hanks who is completing her DPhil in English at Oxford. She has already been in contact with member Mark Hurn at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge, but we wonder if any other SHA members might be able to help her: if so, please contact her directly:

*"I have been working on Robert Stawell Ball, using his lecture notebook held at the Cambridgeshire County Archives. However, Mark Butterworth in his 'A Lantern Tour of Star-Land', Realms of Light (2005), had access to additional notebooks privately held by the Ball family. Whilst I am coming to the end of my thesis (handing in next month!), and so am not looking to carry out new research on these notebooks, I would very much like to track them down, so that I might make a reference to them. Do you know how I can find their whereabouts? It's a minor footnote in my thesis, but I'm so frustrated that it's becoming something of a personal challenge!*

*Best wishes, Sarah Hanks  
St Catz College, Oxford  
[sarahhanks9@gmail.com](mailto:sarahhanks9@gmail.com)"*

## OTHER MEETINGS, COURSES & EXHIBITIONS NOTICED (non-SHA)

### Science & the World Around Us: Liverpool University short courses

The Continuing Education Department of the University of Liverpool is hosting an impressive array of [science courses](#) in the coming academic year, including *Introduction to Classical Mechanics: The Origin of Science* (5 meetings from 10 Oct 2016), *Einstein and the Development of General Relativity* (5 meetings from 15 Feb 2017), and *Introduction to Quantum Mechanics: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Physics Revolution* (8 meetings from 4 Apr 2017).

### A History of the Moon

On Saturday 19th November 2016 (10.30 am - 5.00 pm) at St Cross College, University of Oxford (Centre for the History and Philosophy of Physics)

This [free conference](#) is unfortunately now fully booked, but names can be put on the waiting list.

The Moon, satellite to our Earth, fascinated and inspired the very earliest civilisations as the brightest object in the night sky. Many ancient peoples worshipped the Moon as a deity and used it in the earliest forms of calendar systems. In the seventeenth century Galileo's construction of telescopes enabled him to view the hitherto previously unseen mountains and craters on the surface of the Moon. Although knowledge of the Moon's origins and its influence on the tides developed over subsequent centuries, it was not until the lunar missions, both unmanned and then manned, in the 1950s and 1960s that its composition and many other complex features could be discovered. Over recent decades, there have been a series of lunar satellite and rover missions which have discovered many more intriguing facets of the Moon and continued to progress the knowledge of our satellite. This conference seeks to review the history of the Moon and engage with the latest lunar research on the

prospects of the Moon becoming a future outpost for humans.

Registration to attend this conference is free, but must be confirmed using the [Conference booking form](#) by Monday 14th November.

Confirmed speakers include:

Professor Carolin Crawford (University of Cambridge) - *Early Views of the Moon*

Dr Stephen Pumfrey (Lancaster University) - *'The Bright Side of the Moon': The Historical Significance of Our Tidally Locked Satellite*

Professor Philip Woodworth (National Oceanography Centre) - *Associating the Moon and the Tides*

Professor Ian Crawford (Birkbeck College London) - *The Apollo Programme and Its Legacy*

Professor Bernard Foing (European Space Agency) - *From Recent Probes towards a Human/Robotic Moon Village*

### Old Royal Greenwich Observatory

If you happen to be visiting this historic site before 25 Jun 2017, you may be interested to see the [temporary exhibition](#) of some of the entries in their Astronomy Photographer of the Year Competition.

#### e-News CONTACT DETAILS

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

General communications to the Society should be sent to the **General Secretary** (Laura Carroll): [lauracarroll55@hotmail.com](mailto:lauracarroll55@hotmail.com)

## SHA CALENDAR

MONTH	SHA EVENT OR PUBLICATION	VENUE
<b>2016</b>		
OCT	SHA Bulletin 26 (1 Oct) SHA e-News (1-5 Oct) SHA Autumn Conference & AGM (29 Oct)	Birmingham
NOV		
DEC		
<b>2017</b>		
JAN	SHA e-News (1-4 Jan)	
FEB		
MAR		
APR	SHA Bulletin 27 (1 Apr) SHA e-News (1-5 Apr) SHA visit to Paris Observatory (7 Apr) SHA Spring Conference (22 Apr)	Paris, France Cambridge
MAY		
JUN		
JUL	SHA Summer Picnic (1 Jul) SHA e-News (1-5 Jul) The Antiquarian Astronomer (Jul)	Liverpool
AUG		
SEP		
OCT	SHA Bulletin 28 (1 Oct) SHA e-News (1-5 Oct) SHA Autumn Conference & AGM (28 Oct)	Birmingham