



SHA e-News

Society for the History of Astronomy

Volume 9, no.2, May 2017.

Editor: David Sellers

SHA AT HOME AND ABROAD

Record Attendance at Spring Conference (Cambridge) First ever SHA-SAF-Paris Observatory Conference



Some of the participants before the start of the SHA Spring Conference at Cambridge

The SHA Spring Conference 2017 at the *Institute of Astronomy*, Cambridge, on Saturday 22 April was the most successful conference yet organised by the SHA. Even a week before the event, ninety people had already registered to attend.

Those who did come were treated to excellent presentations on a wide range of topics.

Howard Carlton opened proceedings with a fascinating glimpse at *John Pringle Nichol, the nebular hypothesis, and 19th Century Cosmology*, showing how many contemporaries considered that the nebular hypothesis challenged the Biblical view of a fixed (rather than evolving) universe. We learned incidentally how differently our forbears must have viewed the role of a professor of Astronomy, for the main competitor of Nichol for the chair at Glasgow was none other than Thomas Carlyle, the historian.

In *Dancing to the Music of the Spheres*, James Hannam demonstrated the fallacy embodied in the phrase 'the Dark Ages' – at least when applied to the progress of astronomy. His presentation gave us a taste of the type of curriculum which would have been de-

livered in 15th century universities and the efforts taken to recover and develop the major works of the classical world.

The historic telescopes of the observatories at the IoA were the subject of a guided tour, led by Mark Hurn, during the lunch break.

... continued overleaf

SHA BADGES

Following the idea mooted in the previous issue of SHA e-News, the SHA now has an attractive bronze lapel badge. This is 2.4 cm in diameter and is available to all members free of charge. Collect your free badge at the next SHA event that you attend, or send a stamped addressed jiffy-style bag to, [Gerard Gilligan](mailto:Gerard.Gilligan@shastro.org.uk).





Clockwise from top left: Howard Carlton, James Hannam, Mark Robinson, Stewart Moore, Simon Mitton
(photos: Len Adam)

The afternoon included a wide-ranging presentation by Simon Mitton on the *History of Planetary Science, Discovering the Dynamic Planet Beneath our Feet*. In this Simon delved into the discoveries of many of the remarkable figures in the history of geology and showed their potential application to other worlds.

Appropriately, at a conference falling scarcely two weeks after the bicentenary of the death of the great comet hunter, Stewart Moore delivered a well-timed appreciation of *Charles Messier – From Birth to Death*. This included rarely seen images associated with the astronomer's life and work.

Last but not least, Mark Robinson, gave us a talk on *George With – Mirror Maker*, which was packed with intriguing new material arising from his extensive researches into this astronomer-schoolmaster.

PARIS CONFERENCE

The SHA trip to Paris (Fri. 7 - Sat. 9 April 2017), previously advertised in *e-News*, was a great success.

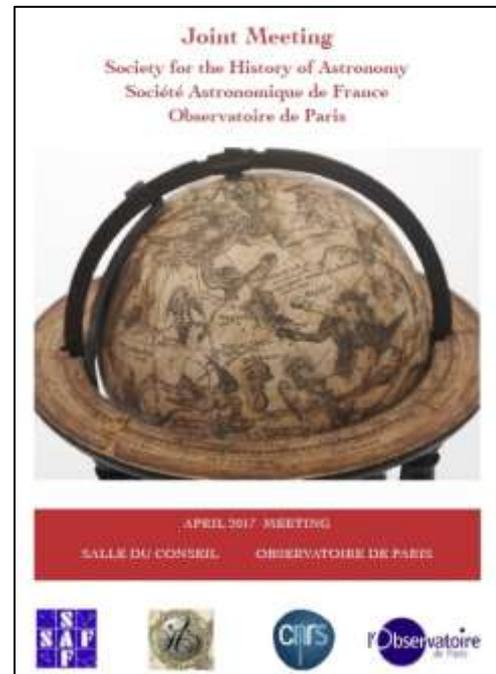
Friday kicked off with the first of what we hope will be regular joint meetings of the SHA, the [History of Astronomy Commission](#) of the Société Astronomique de France (SAF), and the [Observatoire de Paris](#). About 30 people attended the joint meeting, which was held in the prestigious Salle du Conseil at the Observatory, surrounded by large oil portraits of the greats in the history of French astronomy.

After a warm welcome by Prof. David Valls-Gabaud a dozen or so presentations, on a wide range of historical topics, were delivered by speakers from all three organisations. During the morning we were also treated to a guided tour of the historic observatory by Suzanne Débarbat, an expert on its history.

After lunch, there was an opportunity to watch the progress of the sun's image across the brass line in the

Great Meridian Hall, before recommencing the conference.

The meeting went on until 8 pm and was followed by a meal at the historic restaurant, *Le Procopé*.



On the second day we visited the massive (4m diam) [Coronelli globes](#) at the *French National Library* and then were guided by SAF members Jean-Claude Berçu and Alain Ferreira on a walk around some notable gardens and places of astronomical interest in Paris. These included Messier's observatory (at the [Hotel de Cluny](#)), a fifteenth century [planetary clock](#) at the St Genevieve Library, the Sorbonne Observatory, and many spectacular sundials.



On the third day there was a visit to the [observatory](#) and home of Camille Flammarion (the wealthy 19th century author and astronomer) at Juvisy, to the south of the city. There we were shown around by two members of the SAF, Charles White and Guy Artzner. The lovingly restored telescope and observatory were a delight to behold. We also saw the grave of Flammarion and his wife, but it was the library of

Flammarion that was the most stunning. It was bequeathed to the SAF and recently its collections of photographic plates, books, artefacts, and instruments have been officially declared by the French Government to be part of the '[National Heritage](#)', requiring special measures to safeguard them.

Warm thanks are due to our French colleagues for organising and hosting such an enjoyable event. Special thanks are also due to SHA member, Barrie Chacksfield for his role in first suggesting the Paris visit and then liaising closely with Prof. Valls-Gabaud and potential SHA participants, to ensure that things went according to plan.

A full report of the conference will be included in the next issue of the SHA Bulletin.

FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

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 (11.00 am – 5.00 pm). The visit will include a free planetarium show, and behind-the-scenes inspections of the astronomical collections of the museum and library (unfortunately, the viewing of Eyre Crowe's transit of Venus painting, previously announced, will not be possible, due to it being in remote storage). There will be a charge of £7.50 p.p. towards donations to the Museum and Library.

For those staying over in Liverpool, a get-together for an evening meal is being considered.

2017 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for 2017 will be held at the Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS, on **Sat. 28 October 2017**, 9.30 - 17.00.

The speakers and their subjects will be confirmed shortly.

Fee: £10 members, £15 non-members.

For more details and pre-registration, please contact Dennis Osborne at meetings@shastro.org.uk

2018 SPRING CONFERENCE

The venue and other details of the Spring Conference for 2018 are still under discussion.

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 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
Meetings Organiser Dennis Osborne

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 2017:

Sat 8 Jul 2017, Birmingham (BMI)
 Sat 2 Dec 2017 Birmingham (BMI)

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

SHA PUBLICATIONS

SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early August 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 27 of the *Bulletin* at the end of March 2017.



Members with email addresses should also have received a digital version. Issue 28 is expected to be published on 1 October 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 28 (1 Aug 2017); issue 29 (1 Feb 2018)

Back issues (except for the last 2 years) and guidelines for contributions are available from the [Bulletin web page](#).

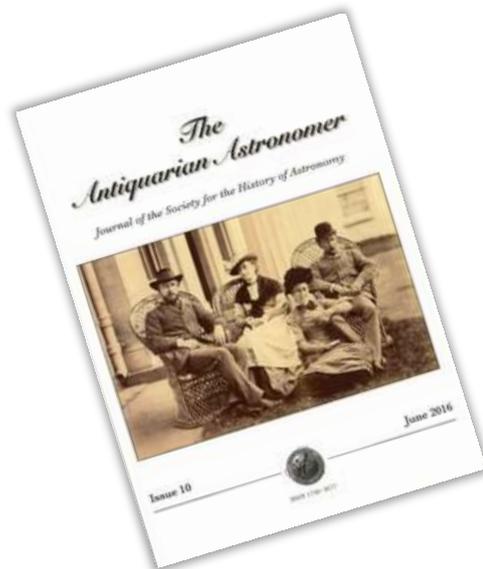
It is usually prudent to check with the Editors before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book reviews). Back issues of the *Bulletin* (and its predecessor: *SHA Newsletter*) are now indexed on the Abstract service of SAO/ NASA. Enter “SHAN” as the ‘Journal Code’ at

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

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

Members and others wishing to submit material for future issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* should contact Ian Ridpath (Editor) at ian@ianridpath.com. Guidance for authors and some back issues can be found on [The Antiquarian Astronomer web page](#).

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.

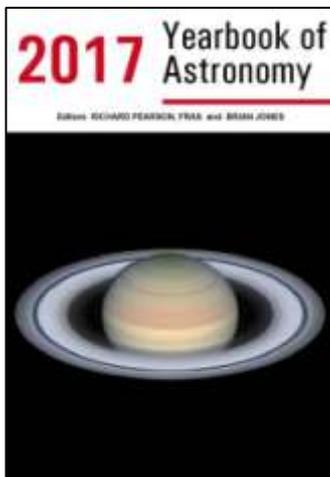
SHA LIBRARY NEWS

The SHA library now has over 2500 books dedicated to the history of astronomy and related subjects, numerous journals, as well as miscellaneous items including letters, meeting programmes, conference proceedings and the like.

Outside the legal deposit libraries, the SHA Library has one of the most extensive history of astronomy collections in any library in the British Isles. It is unique in having a collecting policy, totally focussed on history of astronomy, that includes not only the latest popular and scholarly works, but also the active acquisition of second-hand books, astronomical ephemera, and the preservation of the works of lesser known British astronomers and authors.

Some of the library's new additions:

- **Blaauw**, Adriaan. [History of the IAU](#) (1994)
- **Christianson**, John. [On Tycho's Island: Tycho Brahe, Science, and Culture in the Sixteenth Century](#) (2002)
- **Cudworth**, William. [Life And Correspondence Of Abraham Sharp, The Yorkshire Mathematician And Astronomer, And Assistant Of Flamsteed: With Memorials Of His Family, And Associated Families](#) (1889)



- **Dingle**, Herbert. [The sources of Eddington's philosophy](#). (The Eighth Arthur Stanley Eddington Memorial Lecture, 2 November 1954)
- **Douglas-Menzies**, Lucinda. [Portraits of Astronomers](#) (2009)
- **Fernie**, Donald. [Whisper and the Vision: Voyages of the Astronomers](#) (1977)

- **Fildes**, Gary. [An Astronomer's Tales: A Life Under the Stars](#) (2016)
- **Montgomery**, Scott L. [The Moon and the Western Imagination](#) (1999)
- **Pearson**, Richard. 2017 [Yearbook of Astronomy](#) (2017)
- **Ruggles**, Clive. [Ancient Astronomy: An Encyclopedia of Cosmologies and Myth](#) (2005)
- **Shoreland**, Eileen. Sir John F W Herschel : the forgotten philosopher, a biography by Eileen Shoreland (2016)

Some recent donations [donor in square brackets]:

- **Lound**, Andrew. The Mars Odyssey : a brief history of mars exploration (2003) [Fred Hopper]
- **Main**, Robert. [Rudimentary Astronomy](#) (1852) [Derek Jones]

Milne, EA. Sir James Jeans : a biography by the late E A Milne, with a memoir by S C Roberts (1952)

The next library opening day is Tuesday 2nd May. Carolyn and I have opened the library at least twice a month for the last 18 months but had only one dedicated visit to the library. As such we are likely to reduce the planned opening frequency to once a month; new dates will appear on the website shortly. If there is a specific date you would like to use the library, let us know and we will try to accommodate this.

On library open days the door will be open between 10am and 3pm. Invariably it is open between 9am and 6pm, but please do [contact](#) the library in advance of a visit.

The revised catalogue of books in the library is available and a link to this can be found on the library page of the SHA's [website](#).

James Dawson, SHA Librarian

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).

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.

ASTRONOMICAL BOOK THEFT

Antiquarian books worth more than £2m - including astronomical rarities - have been stolen by a gang who avoided a security system by abseiling into a west London warehouse.

The three [thieves made off with more than 160 publications](#) after raiding the storage facility near Heathrow.

According to the *Mail on Sunday*, one dealer lost £680,000 worth of material. Experts said the most valuable item in the stolen haul was a 1566 copy of Nicolaus Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, worth about £215,000.

Among the other books stolen were early works by Galileo, Isaac Newton, and Leonardo da Vinci.

200th ANNIVERSARY OF REV. HENRY COOPER KEY

Background:

In May 2019 it will be 200 years since the birth of Henry Cooper Key (1819-79) who for 33 years was Rector at Stretton Sugwas, Hereford.

In 1855 he married Ellen Arabella Whinfield and their son Charles was born the following year.

Key was the first person in the UK to make silvered-glass mirrors (1859) and was a contemporary of Rev T. W. Webb and G. H. With.

In 1867 he was using the second largest silvered-glass mirror in the world - of 18-inch aperture - and one of his 12-inch mirrors also helped launch the observing career of David Gill in Aberdeen.

In 1871, working with his Rear Admiral brother, As-
tley, he initiated the Hereford Time Gun.



Rev.H.C.Key

(courtesy of Herefordshire Archives Records Centre)

Proposal:

A celebration of the life of HCK is being planned for a 2-day event in May 2019.

Ideally the venue will be at the Priory Hotel, Stretton Sugwas, which was formerly the Stretton Rectory home of the Key family.

Workshops, talks and visits to local places of interest are proposed.

Accommodation could be booked either at the hotel or at nearby venues in Hereford.

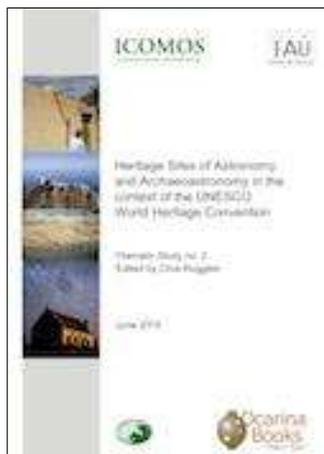
Links with Herefordshire Astronomical Society, The Woolhope Club, and Herefordshire Archives Records Centre are also planned.

Although this proposed event is in 2 years time it would be good to hear from any SHA Members who might be interested in attending a 2-day workshop in Herefordshire.

Please contact event organiser Paul Haley (SHA Member since 2006), if you might be interested in attending this event. Paul's email is: pahastro@aol.com

FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

[Heritage Sites of Astronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention—Volume 2](#), Clive Ruggles and Michael Cotte (Ocarina Books), Aug 2017, pp.298 (paperback, £25.00), ISBN 9780954086763

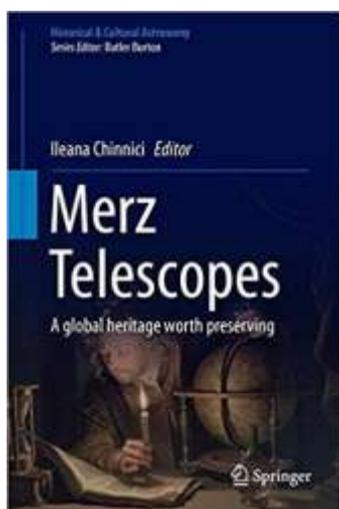


This second ICOMOS–IAU Thematic Study explores in greater depth a number of key issues relating to astronomical heritage that were first identified in its 2010 predecessor. These include the recognition and preservation of the value of dark skies at

cultural and natural sites and landscapes.

Its case studies are developed in greater depth than those in volume 1, and are structured as segments of draft dossiers. They include seven-stone antas (prehistoric dolmens) in Portugal and Spain, the thirteen towers of Chankillo in Peru, the astronomical timing of irrigation in Oman, Pic du Midi de Bigorre Observatory in France, Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, and Aoraki–Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve in New Zealand.

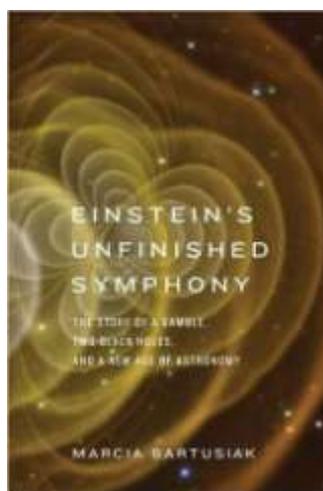
[Merz Telescopes: A global heritage worth preserving](#), by Ileana Chinnici (ed) (Springer), Apr 2017, pp.196 (hardback, £66.99), ISBN 9783319414850



This book comprises a collection of contributions on the Merz telescopes in Italy that collectively offer the first survey on historical large refracting telescopes in the country, drawing on original documents and photographs. It opens with a general introduction on the importance of Merz telescopes in the history of astronomy and

analyses of the local and international contexts in which the telescopes were made. After examination of an example of the interaction between the maker and the astronomer in the construction and maintenance of these refractors, the history of the Merz telescopes at the main Italian observatories in the nineteenth century is described in detail. Expert testimony is also provided on how these telescopes were successfully used until the second half of the twentieth century for research purposes, thus proving their excellent optical qualities.

[Einstein's Unfinished Symphony The Story of a Gamble, Two Black Holes, and a New Age of Astronomy](#), by Marcia Bartusiak (Yale University Press), Aug 2017, pp.296 (hardback, £12.99), ISBN 9780300223392



An updated classic that recounts the long hunt for Einstein's predicted gravitational waves—and celebrates their recent discovery

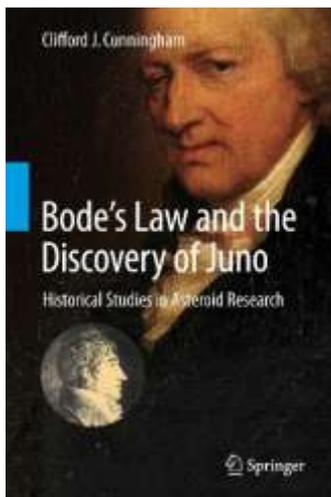
In February 2016, astronomers announced that they had verified the last remaining prediction of Einstein's general theory of relativity—vibrations in space-time, called gravitational

waves. Humanity can now tune in to a cosmic orchestra. We have heard the chirp of two black holes dancing toward a violent union. We will hear the cymbal crashes from exploding stars, the periodic drumbeats from swiftly rotating pulsars, and maybe even the echoes from the Big Bang itself.

Marcia Bartusiak traces the quest of astronomers to build the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) detectors, the most accurate measuring devices humans have created, and the discovery of gravitational waves, revealing the brilliance, personalities, and luck required to start a new age of astronomy.

[Bode's Law and the Discovery of Juno: Historical Studies in Asteroid Research](#), by Clifford Cunningham, May 2017, pp.304 (hardback, £82.00), ISBN 9783319328737

Johann Bode developed a so-called law of planetary distances best known as Bode's Law. The story of the discovery of Juno in 1804 by Karl Harding tells how Juno fitted into that scheme and is examined as it relates to the philosopher Georg Hegel's 1801 thesis that there could be no planets between Mars and



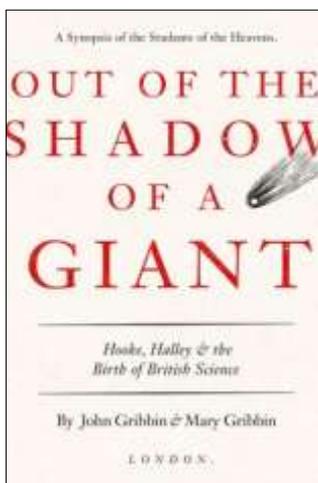
Jupiter. By 1804 that gap was not only filled, but had three residents: Ceres, Pallas and Juno!

When Juno was discovered no one could have imagined its study would call into question Newton's law of gravity, or be the impetus for developing the mathematics of the fast Fourier transform by Carl Gauss.

The fascinating issues raised by the discovery of Juno take us on an extraordinary journey. The revelation of the existence of this new class of celestial bodies transformed our understanding of the Solar System, the implications of which are thoroughly discussed in terms of Romantic Era science, philosophy, poetry, mathematics and astronomy.

The account given here is based on both English and foreign correspondence and scientific papers, most of which are translated for the first time.

[Out of the Shadow of a Giant: Hooke, Halley and the birth of British science](#), by John and Mary Gribbin (William Collins), May 2017, pp.384 (hardback, £25.00), ISBN 9780008220594



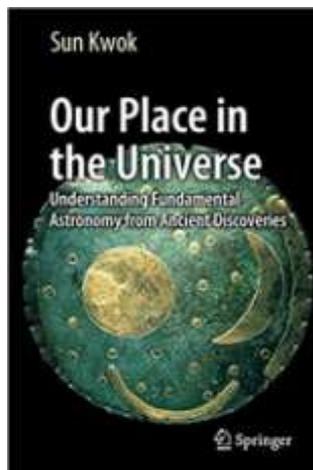
What if Isaac Newton had never lived?

Robert Hooke and Edmond Halley, whose place in history has been overshadowed by the giant figure of Newton, were pioneering scientists in their own right, and instrumental in establishing the Royal Society.

Whilst Newton is widely regarded as one of the greatest scientists of

all time, and the father of the English scientific revolution, John and Mary Gribbin uncover the fascinating story of Robert Hooke and Edmond Halley, whose scientific achievements neatly embrace the hundred years or so during which science as we know it became established in Britain. They argue that even without Newton science in Britain would have made a great leap forward in the second half of the seventeenth century, headed by two extraordinary men, Hooke and Halley.

[Our Place in the Universe: Understanding Fundamental Astronomy from Ancient Discoveries](#), by Sun Kwok (Springer), May 2017, pp.267 (paperback, £19.50), ISBN 9783319541716



Using pictures of the sky observed from different places on Earth, as well as drawings of ancient astronomical methods and tools, Prof. Sun Kwok tells how to understand the basic principles of astronomy and celestial movements in an entertaining and fascinating way.

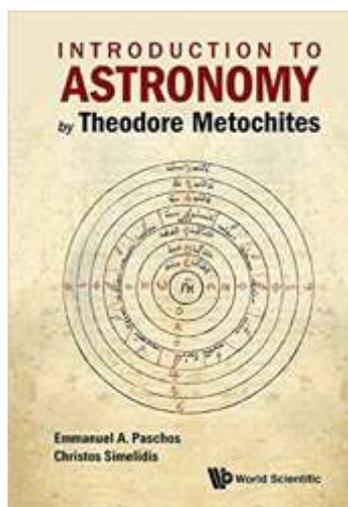
Since the beginning of human civilization, people have wondered about the structure of the cosmos and our place in the Universe. More than 2,000 years ago, our ancestors knew that the seasons were unequal, the Earth was an unattached object floating in space, and stars existed that they could not see. From celestial observations, they concluded that the Earth was round. Using simple tools and mathematics, ancient astronomers accurately determined the sizes of the Earth and Moon, the distance to the Moon, and the lengths of the months and year.

With the armillary sphere, Greek astronomers could predict the times of sunrise and sunset on any day of the year, at any place on Earth. They developed sophisticated mathematical models to forecast Mars' motions hundreds of years into the future.

Find out how ancient observers achieved these remarkable feats. With minimal use of mathematics, this book retraces the footsteps of our ancestors, explains their intellectual journeys in simple terms, and explores the philosophical implications of these discoveries.

[Introduction to Astronomy by Theodore Metochites](#), by Emmanuel Paschos and Christos Simelidis (Word Scientific), Apr 2017, pp.400 (hardback, £131.00), ISBN 9789813207486

Stoicheiosis Astronomike ("Elements of Astronomy") is a late Byzantine comprehensive introduction to Astronomy. It was written by an outstanding figure in Byzantine culture and politics, who served also as prime minister. This volume makes available for the first time a large part of its astronomical contents, offering the original text with an English translation, accompanied by an introduction and analysis.



This book describes the celestial spheres, the rotation of the planets, and especially the apparent trajectory of the sun with its uniform and anomalous rotations, which are used to determine the length of the year. Metochites proposed a new starting date for the calendar (6th of October 1283) specifying the position of the sun on that date.

The work revived the interest in studies of Ptolemaic astronomy as attested by numerous annotations in the margins of the manuscripts.

Besides its astronomical content there are statements on the epistemological method and other issues elucidating the spirit of that age. It will be of interest as an introduction to Byzantine astronomy for historians of science and philosophy, for astronomers, and those interested in the development of calendars.

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.*

HAVE YOUR RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN *THE ANTIQUARIAN ASTRONOMER*

Have you ever considered sharing your research findings with a wider audience of astronomical history enthusiasts? Whether the answer is yes or no, why not consider it now? *The Antiquarian Astronomer* provides a means by which the results of research can be shared and be made available to posterity.

Papers need not be restricted to local astronomical history, but should contain: original research; new interpretation or insight of material already in the public domain; or a description that brings to a wider audience material of limited availability, or that is available only in disparate locations. Naturally, papers offered for publication in *The Antiquarian Astronomer* should not have been published previously.

Papers published in *The Antiquarian Astronomer*, though mainly by amateurs, should be of a standard that will be recognised as giving the research and the Society lasting credibility. To fulfil this principle, each paper is peer-reviewed by one or more Independent Reviewers, in addition to the usual scrutiny by the Editor. Reviewers are selected for being knowledgeable about the subject of the paper, able to provide helpful feedback to the author and to the Editor and supportive of the aims of the Society.



The Antiquarian Astronomer also publishes Essay Reviews of books of significance in the history of astronomy.

For useful guidance about how to prepare your paper, take a look at our [guidelines](#). If you are tempted to send something, why not discuss your plans with the Editor, Ian Ridpath at: journal@shastro.org.uk

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

MEET OUR MEMBERS

SHA members introduce themselves and their interests In this issue: Mike Frost (Warwickshire)



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

I was a founder member of the SHA, although I didn't get to attend the inaugural meeting - I was working at Port Talbot steel works (my day job is in engineering) and something went wrong with our system, so I 'got detention' and so was working in Wales during the SHA's launch at Wadham College. The society was just what I was looking for, as the BAA's Historical Section wasn't very active at the time - obviously I've done something about that subsequently! [ed: Mike is currently Director of the BAA Historical Section]

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

My area of interest is geographical rather than a period of history. I research local astronomers in the Midlands. I live in Rugby, near where Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire meet, and I've researched astronomers in all three counties.

What got you hooked on that?

A good friend at work, Chris Hicks, is a member of Rugby's local history group. When I first got serious about researching Rugby astronomers - Norman Lockyer got me started - Chris was invaluable in showing me how to use local resources. He brings the local knowledge, I bring the scientific context - it works well.

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

I continue to be amazed at the richness of local astronomical history. Only this week I found yet another Rugby-based astronomer who I had not heard of previously - Rev. George Fisher, astronomer on Parry's voyages to seek the Northwest Passage. He retired to Rugby.

Do you actively research, or prefer being an arm-chair scholar?

I enjoy both but the most rewarding is research.

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

I have twice been set Arthur Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers* as an introductory historical text - once when I was about to start an M.Sc in astronomy at Sussex University and once when I did the University of Central Lancashire's *Great Astronomers* course. I loved it both times.

Why?

At heart I'm a story-teller (I sometimes think of myself as being on what Allan Chapman might describe as the Enid Blyton wing of the SHA). Koestler was great at bringing the historical characters to life. Stuart Clark did a similar job with his *Sky's Dark Labyrinth* trilogy.

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

I've just attended the Spring Conference; an excellent program with 90+ attendees. This followed on from the Paris trip, which I was unable to attend, but which everyone I've spoken to gave rave reviews. Seems to me like the SHA is flourishing just as it is.

Who would you nominate as your ideal dinner party guests?

The only previous director of the BAA Historical Section I have met is my immediate predecessor, Tony Kinder, so it would be fun to meet some of the others who are no longer with us. In the last section newsletter, Jacqueline Mitton told us what good company Colin Ronan was, so he'd be on the list - as would Derek Howse and fellow eclipse chasers, Mary and John Evershed, Annie and Walter Maunder, and Elizabeth Brown.

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

We now have two successful events under our belt this session – the joint meeting/visit with the *Société Astronomique de France* in Paris, and the Spring Conference at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge.



Full reports of both meetings will, of course, appear in the Bulletin. Suffice it to say, though, that our French hosts did us proud, in what was a visit of some significance – our first event outside of the UK. We had three

full days of talks and guided tours of several sites of interest.

I'm sure that each one of us who attended has their own particular visit highlight to recount. For me, it was being up front and personal with two of the wooden tube reflectors made by Léon Foucault in the late 1850s. I've always wondered what was the genesis for the spark of genius that led to his discovery/ documentation of the knife-edge test for a paraboloidal surface. Standing next to his telescopes in the old *Observatoire de Paris* building didn't enlighten me on this topic – but it did make me feel a little closer to the spirit of such a polymath: Another remarkable man, of similar ilk to William Herschel. The construction of his telescope tubes bore a striking resemblance to the latter's too.

Prof. David Valls-Gabaud of the Observatoire was our French master of ceremonies, who devised the very impressive programme of events. Our thanks also go to Barrie Chacksfield for both his original idea for the visit, and also for his organisation of the SHA side of things. The very least we can do is offer a reciprocal

joint visit to the UK, most probably sometime next year. Initial planning for this is already underway, and various ideas are being considered regarding venue and dates. We will, though, be looking to follow a similar programme of events.

The Spring Conference at the I of A also broke new ground – the largest attendee list for a Society event to date: 88 were there on the day. Our prior PR efforts were well-rewarded. A significant number of attendees were non-members, and we gained four new recruits. My thanks go to our new Events Organiser, Dennis Osborne, who has made a very impressive debut, and to all those other members who so ably assisted him both on the day and beforehand. Novel attractions, as well as the lecture programme, were James Dawson's comprehensive bookstall, and the introduction of a raffle.

You will already have seen the first of this year's *Bulletins*, bang on schedule and yet another tour de force by our co-editors - the 2017 edition of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* is also on course for issue this Summer. I know that Carolyn, Len and Ian would all welcome your inputs for articles, though. The old adage – the magazine is only as good as the inputs that you, the members provide – is emblazoned across every editor's heart (mine included). Please don't feel that you don't have either the skills or, indeed, anything of significance to say. Try it – you might be pleasantly surprised.

Finally, we have had a remarkable increase in membership in the past year – 40 new members, representing an increase of just a tad short of 30%, no less.

The bottom line is clear – the SHA presence in astronomical circles is becoming ever stronger. Well done to all of you who have helped achieve this vibrancy in Society activities.

Bob Bower



Some of the attendees at the SHA Spring Conference (pic: Len Adam)

WEB-LINKS NOTICED

Women in Astronomy

The *Constructing Scientific Communities* project celebrated International Women's Day this year by reflecting on the role of [women in the history of science](#). Listen to three team members discussing women in astronomy and medicine. Featuring: Professor Sally Shuttleworth, SHA member Dr Lee Macdonald, and Alison Moulds.

BAA Historical Section Spring 2017 Newsletter

The Spring 2017 Newsletter (no.14) of the British Astronomical Association Historical Section [is now available for download](#).

Crawford Collection Virtual Tour

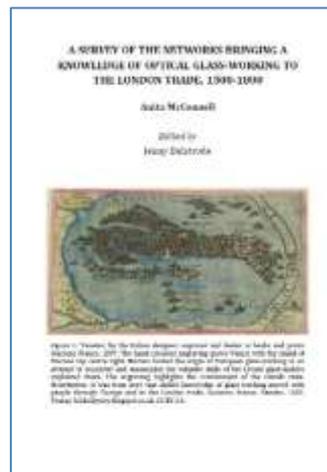
The Crawford Collection of books and manuscripts at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh, one of the most extensive and valuable astronomical libraries in the world, was the gift of James Ludovic Lindsay, 26th Earl of Crawford in 1888. Lindsay was a distinguished amateur astronomer who set up a private observatory on the family's country estate at Dun Echt, Aberdeenshire, in the north of Scotland, in 1872. He appointed David Gill as Director, with whose help he furnished it with a set of astronomical instruments from the best opticians in Europe. Inspired by his father, the 25th Earl of Crawford, a leading bibliophile and book collector, Lord Lindsay also assembled at Dun Echt a magnificent library of astronomical books and manuscripts.

Dun Echt Observatory flourished for almost twenty years but in 1888, on learning that Scotland's modest Royal Observatory, Calton Hill, in the centre of Edinburgh was under threat of closure Lindsay, now 26th Earl of Crawford, saved the day by magnanimously donating the entire contents of his observatory including its by now priceless library to the nation. The whole was housed in a new Royal Observatory at Blackford Hill.

A [virtual tour of the Crawford Collection](#) is now available using Google Street View.

Anita McConnell's 'Glass Monograph'

The Whipple Museum has made available, for free download (in PDF format), the research monograph, [A Survey of the Networks Bringing a Knowledge of Optical Glass-Working to the London Trade, 1500-1800](#), by Anita McConnell.



In October 2013, esteemed scientific instrument scholar Anita McConnell contacted the Whipple Museum, wanting to know if there was any way of putting online an unpublished work she had completed in 1997 on "how the technology of glass working for optical purposes reached Britain, 1600-1800." This work had long been recognized by colleagues as an important account of glass-making technique, but access had been limited to those few who had seen the limited number of privately printed copies in circulation.

The work is dedicated to the memory of Anita herself, who passed away in April 2016, at the age of 80.

History of Preston Astronomy

Paul Browne of the University of Central Lancashire has compiled an interesting account of the history of astronomers and observatories in Preston and surrounding areas.

<http://www.star.uclan.ac.uk/observatories/history/>

<https://uclanthroughtheages.org/2017/03/29/a-brief-history-of-preston-astronomy-guest-blog-post-by-steven-gough-kelly/>

SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

The SHA's [Survey of Astronomical History website](#) now has more than 150 pages, covering thousands of astronomers, hundreds of observatories and other astronomical institutions. The Survey aims to reveal the depth of local history of astronomy online, across the UK and Ireland.

At the latest count, the Survey web pages include entries for 155 British and Irish astronomy groups or societies. Information about groups not included would be very welcome.

SHA ON THE ROAD

The SHA has had publicity stalls at the following events this year:

- **Institute of Astronomy Open Afternoon** (IoA, Cambridge, 25 March 2017)

- **Society for Popular Astronomy Convention** (IoA, Cambridge, 1 April 2017)

In addition, the Publicity Officer has set up SHA stalls to accompany his historical talks as follows:

- **Cholesbury cum St Leonards Historical Group** (*Some Aspects of Buckinghamshire Astronomy*, 2 December 2016)

- **North East London Astronomical Society** (*Astronomy in the Ancient World*, 19 February 2017)

- **Breckland Astronomical Society** (*Some Aspects of Norfolk Astronomy*, 14 April 2017)

Events later in the year at which we intend or hope to present include:

- **Webb Society meeting** (3 June 2017, IoA, Cambridge)

- **NW Astronomy Festival** (1/2 July 2017, Runcom)

- **Starfest** (15 July 2017, Chelmsford)

- **South West Astronomy Fair** (12 August 2017, Norman Lockyer Observatory, Sidmouth, Devon)

- **International Astronomy Show** (13/14 October 2017, Stoneleigh Park)

- **FAS Convention** (October 2017)



SHA stall at the SPA Convention (1 April 2017)

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. Please contact the Publicity Officer, [Mike Leggett](#), first to check whether help is needed. Please note that help with travel expenses can only be given in line with the SHA [expenses policy](#) and on the basis of prior agreement.

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



20% discount off Springer books

As readers will have seen, members of the SHA are now entitled to a 20% discount off books from *Oxford University Press* and *Cambridge University Press*. I have now negotiated a 20% discount off a selection of Springer books for SHA members. **This discount will only be available to members for 30 days after an SHA event** (e.g. Spring Conference, Autumn Conference); the discount will also only be available for 100 uses – if 100 people buy a book using the discount code, the code will then deactivate and no more books can be purchased using that discount code; a new discount code will then be issued at the next SHA event.

If you want to take advantage of this please browse the [catalogue](#) of Springer books which the discount can be applied to, and contact [Gerard Gillian](#), membership secretary, to obtain the discount code.

James Dawson, SHA Librarian

INFORMATION WANTED

Blue Plaque Mapping

We are still looking to compile a definitive list of astronomers who have been commemorated by a blue plaque and we need your help doing this. Please get in touch if you know of any such plaques (particularly those outside London). We would also love to receive any photos that have been taken of the plaques. The results of this survey will appear later this year in the bulletin.

Carolyn Kennett, James Dawson
carolyn@hird.net



Blue plaque on the wall of Thornhill Parish Church, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire (St Michael & All Angels) commemorating John Michell

John Michell spent the last half of his life at Thornhill, near Dewsbury, as [the rector of St Michael and All Angels Church](#).

It was from here that he made major contributions to astronomy, including the prediction that some stars would be so massive that even light would not achieve the escape velocity needed to leave the surface - in other words, the existence of black holes. He also designed a torsion balance that could be used for determining the average density of the Earth. Unfortunately, he died before he could utilise the balance, but his friend Henry Cavendish acquired the apparatus after Michell's death and gained everlasting fame for successfully measuring the gravitational constant (G) with it.

The plaque was unveiled by Chris Butlin (*Institute of Physics*), who produced a pamphlet about Michell for the occasion. This is [still available for download](#).

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

BAA Historical Section Meeting

The next meeting of the [Historical Section of the British Astronomical Association](#) will on Sat 25 Nov 2017 at the Birmingham and Midlands Institute (BMI). We will post details of speakers and themes when these are available.

The SHA Library will be open on that day to enable visits by BAA members.

NDXIII – 13th Biennial History of Astronomy Workshop

The [Thirteenth Biennial History of Astronomy Workshop \(NDXIII\)](#) will be held July 5-9, 2017, at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and will include a one-day trip to the Adler Planetarium in Chicago.

The theme of the workshop will be: *Models and Mechanisms in the History of Astronomy*

Models and mechanisms have played an important role throughout the history of astronomy, both as physical devices and as conceptual entities. In exploring this workshop theme, we invite you to consider such questions as: What do we know about historical astronomical models and mechanisms, including their origins, development, and abandonment? How have physical models and mechanistic devices influenced major developments in astronomy and related fields? How have mental models and mechanistic thinking shaped astronomical concepts and explanations? As in previous years, we expect that the theme can encompass a number of different time periods and geographical locations. The specially invited speaker this year will be Emeritus Professor Mike G. Edmunds of Cardiff University, Chair of the *Antikythera Mechanism Project*.

The deadline for papers and sessions is 1 Mar and the decision date is 1 Apr.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to give a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined since the last issue of *SHA e-News*:

- Mr Brian Faulkner (Liskeard, Cornwall)
- Mr Robert Allen Garfinkle (Union City, California, USA)
- Mr/Mrs David/Hilary Harper-Abernethy (Liverpool, Merseyside)
- Mr Brian Jones (Bradford, Yorkshire)
- Mr Christopher Hustwick (Keighley, West Yorkshire)
- Mr Kenneth Clark (Wallasey, Merseyside)
- Dr John Fisher (London)
- Dr William Scutcher (Grimsby, Lincolnshire)
- Mr Michael Atkins (Cambridgeshire)
- Mr James Clarke (Coventry)
- Dr Nick Lomb (Victoria, Australia)
- Mr Paul Guy (West Midlands)
- Dr Richard Young (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk)
- Mr Frank Dutton (Norfolk)
- Mr Derek P. Barker (Birmingham)
- Mr Harold Michael Scott (Cambridge)

Webb Society Annual Meeting

The [2017 Webb Society Annual Meeting](#) will be held at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge, on Saturday 3 June 2017 (9.30-18.00). The agenda includes several presentations of a historical character, namely:

Wolfgang Steinicke on *William Herschel's hole in the sky and the discovery of dark nebulae*;

A film by film maker George Sibley entitled *William Herschel and the Universe* (featuring Wolfgang Steinicke);

Mark & Janet Robinson on *Webb to Ranyard: one half of a correspondence*.

Members and non-members of the Webb Society are welcome to attend. Booking is not necessary.

Oxford Museum of the History of Science: Film Screening *William Herschel and the Universe*

On Tue 13 June 2017 (18.00-19.30) the [Museum of the History of Science](#) in Oxford will host a special viewing of the new film [William Herschel and the Universe](#). Introduced by former Museum Director Professor Jim Bennett and the filmmaker George Sibley, the film will be followed by a Q&A.

On March 13th, 1781, in his own back yard, using a telescope he built himself, a 42-year old musician named William Herschel found a new planet for the first time in history. That discovery doubled the size of the known solar system and would change not only his own life, but astronomy as well. *William Herschel and the Universe*, a film by Florida film maker George Sibley, tells the story of how a previously unknown amateur astronomer and his telescopes took the scientific world by storm.

Tickets need to be reserved via [EventBrite](#)

SHA CALENDAR

| MONTH | SHA EVENT OR PUBLICATION | VENUE |
|-------------|---|----------------------------|
| 2017 | | |
| JAN | | |
| FEB | SHA e-News (1-5 Feb) | |
| MAR | | |
| APR | SHA Bulletin 27 (1 Apr) SHA visit to Paris Observatory (7 Apr) SHA Spring Conference (22 Apr) | Paris, France Cambridge |
| MAY | SHA e-News (1-5 May) | |
| JUN | | |
| JUL | SHA Summer Picnic (1 Jul) The Antiquarian Astronomer (Jul) | Liverpool |
| AUG | SHA e-News (1-5 Aug) | |
| SEP | | |
| OCT | SHA Bulletin 28 (1 Oct) SHA Autumn Conference & AGM (28 Oct) | Birmingham |
| NOV | SHA e-News (1-5 Nov) | |
| DEC | | |

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