



Society
for the
History of Astronomy

Speakers and Presentations for the 2023 Spring Conference

Online Zoom Conference from 1pm Saturday, 1st April

1pm – 5pm

Order of Speakers & Presentations are Subject to Change.



Miss Megan Briers Currently MPhil student of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge, with an interest in nineteenth-century astronomical fieldwork.

“Nineteenth-century Astronomical Fieldwork”

Increased mathematical precision in the 19th century meant that solar eclipse expeditions became regular features in the calendars of astronomers, as the location of totality could be predicted accurately enough to allow countries to send out parties to investigate properties of the corona. There were women accompanying all the British eclipse parties from 1842 until 1871 but despite the academic attention given to these eclipse expeditions, the role of women on the expeditions has often been left as an aside in accounts of the scientific aims of the predominantly male astronomers. Questions about the involvement of the women remain as basic as why they participated in the expeditions.

This paper will discuss the value of the women involved with the 1870 eclipse expeditions. This eclipse was chosen due to the quantity of archival material from the women involved and the instability of astronomy and eclipse expedition structure in 1870. Through assessing the roles of the women on the expedition, an argument is presented about the value given to women as objective observers in this period of astronomy.

Women were perceived to have an unbiased mind, due to a lack of astronomical knowledge. This perception, combined with their social standing, granted them some level of authority within the expeditions, and they were commonly involved with the verification of a male astronomer’s observations. However, this lack of knowledge and ideas of limited intellectual capacities meant there was a strict ceiling on their participation, and their contributions of original observations were not respected.



Carolyn Bedwell FRAS is currently doing freelance work researching science quotations for the Oxford English Dictionary. Having a lifelong interest in the subject, she has a degree in astronomy and is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. As well as being Assistant Librarian for the Society for the History of Astronomy, she is Secretary of Leicester Astronomical Society and on the Committee of the Commission for Dark Skies.

She had been researching Leicestershire astronomers for some years before joining the Society for the History of Astronomy in 2015. In 2014 she first nominated William Pearson (1767-1847), for a Green Plaque at his former residence at South Kilworth in Leicestershire. And again in 2015, and 2016. By 2017, Pearson had moved up the shortlist and won a public vote. It was agreed to unveil the plaque on 16th January 2020, close to the 200th anniversary of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Since joining the Society for the History of Astronomy she has written articles for the Bulletin and contributed a chapter to the 20th Anniversary booklet. She was given the Peter Hingley Award in 2019.

“William Ludlam, (1717 -1788) - A Leicester Astronomer”

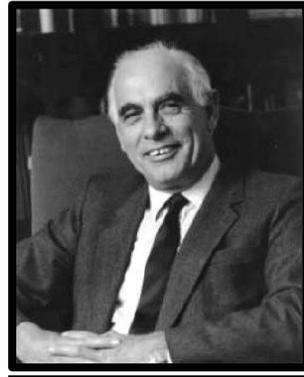
William Ludlam (1717–1788) was born in Leicester and attended Leicester Grammar School, and subsequently St John’s College, Cambridge. He became a Fellow in 1744. Having been ordained in 1741, he was Rector of Norton-by-Galby, Leicestershire, 1749-88 and Rector of Cockfield, Suffolk, 1767-88.

He was Director of St John’s Observatory, and added astronomical instruments to the church tower at Cockfield. He spent most of the last twenty years of his life in Leicester where he made astronomical observations. In 1785 he wrote Rudiments of Mathematics, a textbook for use in universities.

Ludlam was known for his skill in practical mechanics as well as astronomy and was appointed to the Board of Longitude in 1765. The same year he wrote a report on John Harrison’s chronometer His observations in Leicester were published in Philosophical Transactions, including the 1769 transit of Venus and a solar eclipse in 1778. He used quadrants made by Bird and Hadley and a Dollond telescope.

Continued on page 3.....

The Michael Hoskin Memorial Lecture.



Professor Michael Hoskin (1930 – 2021)

This is the first year our main Spring Conference lecture will be held in memory of the late Professor Michael Hoskin, who sadly left us in 2021. He became a great supporter of the SHA from when it was first established in the summer of 2002. He became the first of two Society Hon Vice-Presidents, along with Sir Patrick Moore. Michael Hoskin was a pre-eminent and world renowned historian of astronomy plus science, with notable research articles and many books on the astronomer William Herschel, his sister Caroline and the wider Herschel family. He is will also be remembered for his work in the archaeoastronomy of the Mediterranean Megalithic Tombs. Founder of the very successful Journal of the History of Astronomy, which he was editor for many years. In 2001 Michael was honoured by the International Astronomical Union with the designation of an asteroid as *Minor Planet Hoskin*. His was a remarkable, lengthy and extraordinarily energetic career, marked by consistently lucid, able and exemplary scholarship and engaging teaching and personal encouragement.



Ms Carolyn Kennett FRAS is a writer, researcher and astronomer who lives in Cornwall. She researches ancient communities and how they made connections to their skylscapes. She is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and her books include *Sites of Prehistoric Bodmin Moor* (2022), *Uranus and Neptune* (2022), *Celestial Stone Circles of West Cornwall* (2018) and *Neptune: From Grand Discovery to World Revealed* (2021). She is a communicator of all things astronomical and runs her own walking tours and outreach business Archaeoastronomy Cornwall, while being a director of Mayes Creative, who deliver arts, science and heritage projects throughout Cornwall

“The Dolcoath Mine Experiments: Airy and Whewell and their attempts to Weigh the World”

In 1826 and 1828 attempts were made by a group of eminent scientists including George Biddell Airy and William Whewell to measure the density of the Earth. They would travel to the far southwest of England to Cornwall and down the deepest mine in the country at Dolcoath to undertake the experiment. Both attempts were beset by challenges including the unfortunate smashing of one of the precision pendulums. From 2021 to 2022 a group of enthusiasts are going to re-create the experiments within a Cornish mine, led by Carolyn Kennett (FRAS). This talk will explore both the past and modern versions of the experiment as we descend into the bowels of the earth to try and weigh the world.

28.02.2023