



# SHA e-News

*Society for the History of Astronomy*

**Volume 17, no.3, August 2025**

**Editor: David Sellers**

## **SHA 'AL FRESCO' AT JODRELL BANK** **Friday 27 June 2025**

Every year, the Society for the History of Astronomy holds a picnic at a site of astronomical interest. For 2025, we picked Jodrell Bank as our meeting place, and on Friday 27th June, fourteen SHA members and guests gathered at this iconic location in the Cheshire countryside.



**The Lovell radio telescope**

For most attendees, the day began with the picnic. Jodrell Bank has several cafes, but the weather was warm and sunny, so we were able to eat a proper outside picnic.

After lunch, we explored the site, which has undergone substantial renovation in recent years. The most impressive addition is the First Light Pavilion, which features an excellent interactive exhibition, and the Space Dome cinema, in which we watched two short movies, one on current activities at Jodrell Bank, and the other, narrated by Brian Cox, giving a more historical perspective.

To the north of the First Light Pavilion is an arboretum, worth a stroll round, but the main attraction – of course! – is to the south: the giant Lovell telescope and

its three siblings, the Mark II, 42-ft and 7m radio telescopes. There is a walkway round the Lovell scope, with plenty of information plaques, and a seat commemorating the late Ian Morison, who was well-known in both the amateur and professional astronomy communities. There is also the Space Pavilion, a home for temporary exhibitions. To my surprise, the exhibition for 2025 was built around the Royal Astronomical Society's 200th anniversary quilt, which I hadn't seen in real-life before. The accompanying film featured, among others, RAS librarian Sian Prosser (a speaker at our upcoming AGM) and Karen Nyberg, ISS astronaut and the first quilter into space.

Most of the attendees, including me, rounded off the visit by attending the astronomy talk given by Martin, one of the interpretative staff. This was aimed more at the general public rather than astronomers such as us, but was still entertaining. And the Lovell dish, which had been stationary all day for maintenance work, finally sprang to life so that we could watch it moving, through the windows of the Wolfson Auditorium. Then it was time to "exit through the gift shop", passing underneath the planetary orrery which hangs from the ceiling of the Planet Pavilion.

There was one last stop for a couple of us. Bernard Lovell, who drove forward the building of the first radio telescope, lived in the nearby village of Swettenham, and one of his projects later in his life was the building of another, larger arboretum on the outskirts of the village, overlooking the River Dane valley and the Holmes Chapel railway viaduct. There are short, medium and long self-guided walks available, and I took the longest option, strolling round for half an hour or so before enjoying a burger and a pint in the Swettenham Arms.

Excellent day! Thanks to everyone who came along.

*Report by Mike Frost*

Pictures from the SHA Jodrell Bank picnic



Fourteen members and guests attended (Photo by Beverley McConville)



RAS 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Quilt



The Lovell Arboretum



## FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

### 2025 AGM & AUTUMN CONFERENCE

This will be on **Sat 8 Nov 2025** at **10 am–4.30 pm** at the Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St, Birmingham, B3 3BS

Speakers:

**Sian Prosser** – *Charting the heavens in type: the oldest astronomical printed books in the Royal Astronomical Society Library*

**Jacqueline Mitton**– *The extraordinary astronomical life of Mary Williamson*

**Mike Leggett** – *Astronomy and Exploration*

**Louise Devoy**– *Observatory Objects (commemorating 350 years of the Greenwich Observatory)*

### 2026 SUMMER PICNIC

For 2026 we are looking at holding the summer picnic at Birr Castle in Ireland, the home of Lord Rosse's great reflecting telescope – the '[Leviathan of Parsonstown](#)'. Please let us know what you think.

### ONLINE MEETINGS

Free online evening presentations for members:

**Wed 8 Oct 2025**

Title: **Astronomical history research techniques**

Contributors: **Mike Leggett, Carolyn Bedwell, & Bill Barton**

**Wed 26 Nov 2025**

Title: **Henry Enfield Roscoe, the spectroscopist**  
(and friend of Joseph Baxendell)

Speaker: **Peter Morris**

**Wed 14 Jan 2026**

Title: **Marie Curie and her astronomical connections**

Speaker: **Dava Sobel**

Links will be sent to members nearer to the dates.

## SHA COUNCIL

The current SHA Officers & Council are:

### Honorary Council Members

**Hon President** Dr Allan Chapman

**Hon Vice-Presidents** Dr Emily Winterburn, Prof. Mike Edmunds

### Council Members

**Chair** Carolyn Kennett

**Vice-Chair (& e-News Editor)** David Sellers

**General Secretary** Mike Leggett

**Treasurer** Geoff King

**Asst. Treasurer** Bill Barton

**Membership Secretary** Graham Jones

**SHA Bulletin Editor** Kevin Walsh

**Publicity Officer** Geoff King

**Survey Coordinator** Kevin Johnson

**Online Editor** John Chuter

**Librarian** James Dawson

**Meetings/Events Secretary** Mike Frost

### Co-opted Officers

**Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer** Peter Morris

**Deputy Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer** Ian Ridpath

**Archivist** John Chuter

**Assistant Librarian** Carolyn Bedwell

**SHA booklet distributor** Gerard Gilligan

### SHA COUNCIL MEETINGS

The next SHA Council meeting will be on:

**Wed 24 Sep 2025, 6 p.m. (via 'Zoom')**

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

## RESEARCH WORKSHOP?

The SHA Council is looking at organising a one-day workshop on methods of conducting research in the history of astronomy. It would be useful to know what demand there would be for such an event. If you are interested, please contact the [Editor](#).

## SHA PUBLICATIONS

### SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early-Nov 2025. 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](#) (David Sellers).



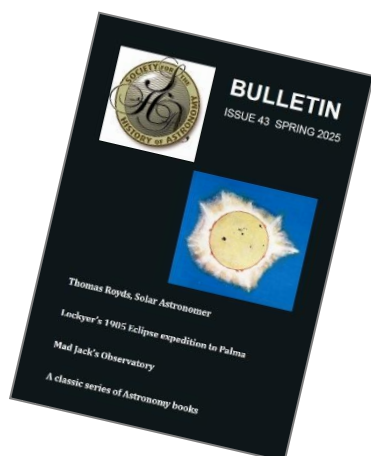
Back issues and guidelines for contributions are available from the [e-News web page](#).

### SHA BULLETIN

**Issue 43** of the *Bulletin* (Spring 2025) was distributed to SHA members in early May 2025. **Issue 44** (Winter 2025) is due around November/December.

Contributions to the *Bulletin* are most welcome, including letters which can be on any aspect of the Society or the history of astronomy.

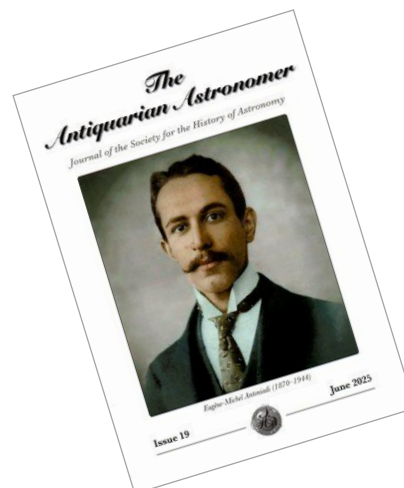
Back issues (except for the last 2 years) and guidelines for contributions are available from the [Bulletin web page](#).



It is usually prudent to check with the [Editor](#) (Kevin Walsh) before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book or film reviews).

## THE ANTIQUARIAN ASTRONOMER

**Issue 19** of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* was sent out to all members in mid-June 2025.



The subjects include: *Annie Walker*, by Roger Hutchins & Mark Hurn; *Eugène-Michel Antoniadi*, by Richard McKim and Bill Sheehan; *Shirburn Castle Observatory*, by Timothy Baker; *Elizabeth Mary Williamson*, by Jacqueline Mitton; *Eclipse expeditions at the NLO*, by Beatrice Steele; and the *Solar eclipse of 1925 in Connecticut*, by Horace Smith & Roy Kilgard.

**Issue 20** should be published in June/July 2026. Members and others wishing to submit material for future issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* should contact the Editor (Peter Morris) at [aaeditor@shastro.org.uk](mailto:aaeditor@shastro.org.uk). Guidance for authors and some back issues can be found on [The Antiquarian Astronomer web page](#).

Please note that, from issue 19, Ian Ridpath and Peter Morris have swapped roles as Editor and Deputy Editor respectively. Ian edited our much-respected journal for 10 years and the SHA is greatly indebted to him for his work.

## SAFEGUARDING POLICY

The SHA now has in place a policy on ‘**Safeguarding**’.

Our Society’s activities include working with vulnerable people, face to face, and online. The purpose of [this safeguarding policy](#) is to protect children and vulnerable adults and to provide members, other stakeholders and the public with the overarching principles that guide our approach in doing so.

Please let [Carolyn Kennett](#) or [James Dawson](#) (our nominated *safeguarding officers*) know, if you have any concerns regarding this issue.

## SHA LIBRARY NEWS

The SHA library now has about 3000 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 focused 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 work of lesser known British astronomers and authors.

We continue to look for and obtain new items (newly printed or second-hand books) for the Library and a list of the latest acquisitions is given below. I have started working my way through some boxes of items which have been sitting unsorted for several years and cataloguing these. Many are just pamphlets and booklets, but still interesting and important for the history of astronomy. More information about these is in the full catalogue.

*Author Title Year*

Astronomy Magazine, *Astronomy Magazine: 3 DVD ROM 1973-2010; 2011-2015; 2016-2020*

Baker, *Starwatchers: A History of Discovery in the Night Sky*, 2025

Cashford, *The moon: myth and image*, 2003

Chapman, *Astronomy in the Life of Sir John Herschel*, 2025

Mendillo, *Saints and Sinners in the Sky: astronomy, religion and art in western culture*, 2022

Pritchard, *Charles Pritchard, late Savilian professor of astronomy in the University of Oxford: memoirs of his life/ comp. by his daughter, Ada Pritchard*, 1897

Longdon, *Encounter '86: an international rendezvous with Halley's comet*, 1986

Kanas, *Star maps. History, artistry, and cartography*, 2019

Toulmin, *Man and the Heavens* (talks for sixth forms, BBC broadcasts to schools spring term), 1959

ILEA, *Astronomy notes for teachers*. Educational Television Service, nd

Allen, *The framework of astronomy; an inaugural lecture delivered at University College, London, 1 May 1952*, 1952



**BMI (Birmingham): home of the SHA Library**

Dyson, *Inauguration of the Mond Photographic Equatorial. The Norman Lockyer Observatory, Salcombe Hill Sidmouth*, 1932

Gould, *John Harrison and his timekeepers*, 1987

Hannavy, *Fox Talbot: an illustrated life of William Henry Fox Talbot, 'Father of Modern Photography' 1800-1877*, 1984

Lockyer, *Handbook to the Norman Lockyer Observatory: Salcombe Hill Sidmouth*. 2nd edition, 1935

Mills, *Thomas Harriot: a brief report*, 2009

Spencer Jones, *John Couch Adams and the discovery of Neptune*, 1947

Whitaker, *The University of Arizona's Lunar and Planetary Laboratory: its founding and early years*, 1986

Cooper, *Rocket Man: reminiscences of a career as a real life Rocket Man spanning 15 years involved with the British National Space Programme*, 2006

Frank, *Charles Frank's Catalogue: telescopes and binoculars*, 1978

Legin, *The astronomical clock in pictures*, 1983

Macpherson, *Biographical dictionary of astronomers*, 1940

Miles, *The comet is coming! Halley's Comet and how to find it... commemorative issue*, 1985

Nath, *A handbook of Maharajah Jaisingh's astronomical observatory, Delhi*, nd

NMM, *The old Royal Observatory: a brief guide*, 1967

Singh, *Astronomical observatory of Jaipur*, 1981

(SHA), *Library Manual and Catalogue*, 2009

Below are the recent donations to the SHA Library:

*Author Title Year Donor*

Bell, *The Interstellar Age: The Story of the NASA Men and Women Who Flew the Forty-Year Voyager Mission*, 2016 - Hutchins, Roger

Hutchins, *Yorkshiremen with clout: the Leeds Astronomical Society of 1859, and the pursuit of astronomy at Leeds University after 1904*, 1997 - Hutchins, Roger

Wright, *Dark Skies: Bright Stars. John Couch Adams and the discovery of Neptune*, n.d. - Hutchins, Roger

Weddell, *Life of James Scott: the Selkirk mason-astronomer*, 1935 - Sellers, David

A 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](#) (as a downloadable Excel spreadsheet); if you have trouble viewing the catalogue let us know and we can arrange to send it to you in an alternative format.

If you want to know more about the library, or 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.

James Dawson, SHA Librarian  
[library@shastro.org.uk](mailto:library@shastro.org.uk)

### LIBRARY APPEAL

The SHA Library is still short of the following three print issues of the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*. If anyone is able to donate one or more of these, please contact [James](#).

**Volume 50 part 3 (180) 2019**

**Volume 50 part 1 (178) 2019**

**Volume 17 part 1 (48) 1986**

## SHA SURVEY NEWS

The following inputs have been added to the Survey since May. The majority of new names were identified by Phil Barnard from the Macpherson Directory. The list has the useful feature of being biased towards Scottish astronomers, an area under-represented on the Survey. Notable examples are Roberts and Sampson, both professional university astronomers. Other professional astronomers of note are Baker and Greaves. As might be expected Macpherson's list is almost entirely focussed upon professional astronomers. An interesting example is Thomas Royds who first worked at Manchester University under Arthur Schuster before going to India to work at the Kodaikanal Solar Observatory, India. He later worked at Istanbul, Turkey before retiring to Southport.

Other contributions by members and the public include, *William Herbert Watts*, a teacher at the Birkenhead Institute (Wilfred Owen's school) –

Gerard Gilligan; *Thomas Perkins*, a teacher and cleric living in Shaftesbury, Dorset, for the latter part of his life - Bill Barton; and *Moffat Astronomy/Moffat Community Observatory* along with the *Eric Tomney Memorial Observatory* established by the Astronomy Society of Glasgow - William McGovern.

### Midlothian

Baker, Edwin Arthur [FRSE] (1891-1980)

Greaves, William Michael Herbert [FRAS] (1897-1955)

Roberts, Alexander William [FRAS] (1858-1938)

Sampson, Ralph Allen (1866-1939)

### County of London

Melotte, Philibert Jacques [FRAS] (1880-1961)

Herschel, John [Col. RE; FRAS] (1837-1921)

### Lanarkshire

Nichol, John Pringle [FRAS] (1804-1859)

### Aberdeenshire

Reid, William (1861-1928)

### Lancashire

Royds, Thomas (1884-1955)

### Associated People

### Lanarkshire/Roxburghshire

Maclaurin, Colin (1698-1746)

### Midlothian/Roxburghshire

Napier, John (1550-1617)

### Cheshire

Watts, William Herbert [FRAS] (1874-1952)

### Dumfriesshire

Moffat Community Observatory [MCOD] (2021- )

Moffat Astronomy Club [MACD]

### Stirlingshire

Eric Tomney Memorial Observatory (2023-).

Also, Herkless [nee Knox], Margaret Ferguson (1851-1911), born Glasgow was married to Prof. William Robertson Herkless (Glasgow University). She was a founder member of the BAA, and had articles on aurorae, the zodiacal lights and astrophysics published in the association journal. Suffering from mental ill health in later life, she left generous legacies to Glasgow Infirmary and University. She was a somewhat enigmatic figure, who was sent to a public asylum in the 1890s. Her husband (W.R. Herkless) was a Liverpool AS member.

Kevin Johnson - Survey Coordinator, 20 Jul 2025



## SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA *Small Research Grants* are available for the period **1 Nov 2024 to 31 Oct 2025** and applications are solicited. The total amount allocated by the Council for the current 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. The research grants panel consists of: the Chair, vice-Chair, General Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the SHA (with powers to co-opt outside advice).

## 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*:

<b>Prof. Roy Kilgard</b>	<b>Middletown, CT, USA</b>
<b>Mr Paul Ranford</b>	<b>Buckinghamshire</b>
<b>Dr Toner Stevenson</b>	<b>Australia</b>

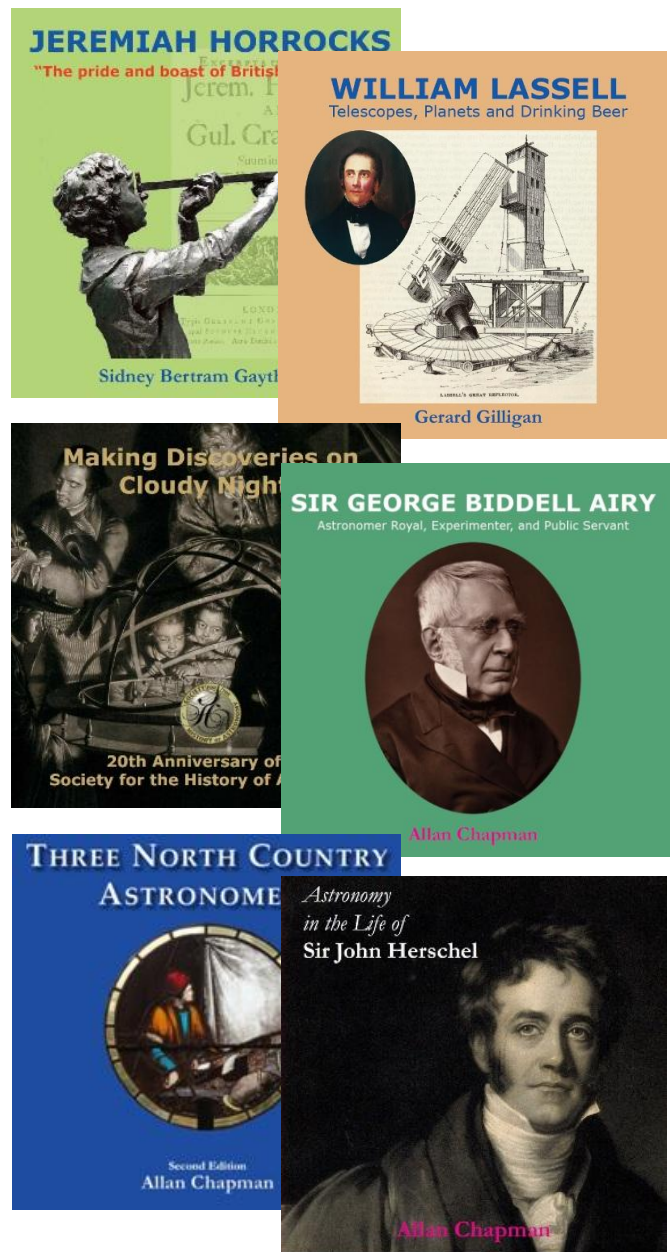
## SHA REVISED CONSTITUTION

The seventh version of the SHA Constitution (adopted at the 2024 AGM) is [now available on our website](#).

## VOLUNTEER A PRESENTATION?

Do you have a mini-presentation that you would like to make to an online SHA meeting? The SHA organises occasional online meetings featuring several short talks, where members can present topics that they have been researching. If you have something up your sleeve and would like to give it a go, please let our [Meetings Secretary](#) know.

## SHA BOOKLET SERIES



Six titles in the SHA's occasional booklet series have been published so far: One on *Jeremiah Horrocks* (2020, £8), by Sidney B Gaythorpe; one on *William Lassell* (2021, £8), by Gerard Gilligan; one for the *SHA 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (2022, £10) by various authors; one on *Sir George Biddell Airy* (2023, £12), by Allan Chapman; a revised edition of *Three North Country Astronomers* (2024, £8), by Allan Chapman; and *Astronomy in the Life of Sir John Herschel*, by Allan Chapman (2025, £10). The prices relate to purchase at SHA events. For mail order costs, please contact [bookshop@shastro.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@shastro.org.uk).

The next anticipated title is *A History of Archaeoastronomy*, by Carolyn Kennett. If you wish to suggest topics and/or authors for the future, please let the Editor know ([David Sellers](#)).

## A WORD FROM THE CHAIR



I hope you've all been enjoying the summer months reading your copy of the most recent *Antiquarian Astronomer*.

Although I was unable to attend, I heard that the summer picnic at Jodrell Bank on 27th June was blessed with perfect weather and I was pleased to

hear from the reports that people had a fun and informative day out.

I did have the pleasure of catching up with a number of our members in the South West at the BAA Historical Section meeting, held at the remarkable Devon and Exeter Institute in Exeter on 31st May. The meeting took on a truly international flavour as we explored the travels and contributions of several historical astronomers, including Roger Langdon, Mary Proctor, Norman Lockyer, and John Tebbutt.

More recently, I had the opportunity to travel to New Mexico to attend an archaeoastronomy conference hosted by the Tularosa Institute. I gave a talk on the use of moonlight in the design of ancient monuments, particularly how it interacts with features such as rock art and deposits of yellow clay to create intentional illumination effects.

While in New Mexico, I also had the privilege of visiting several ancient sites with astronomical significance, including the well-known supernova petroglyph in Chaco Canyon. This fascinating piece of rock art is thought to depict the supernova of 1054 AD, an astronomical event so bright it was visible in daylight. The petroglyph shows a star-like figure beside a crescent moon below a handprint, carved high on an overhang of a cliff face. Kim Malville interpreted this as a record of the appearance of the supernova near the Moon. I've since learnt that it is one of several such images found across the American Southwest all linked to sightings of this incredible event.

What makes the 1054 supernova especially remarkable is that it was not only observed in North America but was also carefully documented in other parts of the world. In China, astronomers recorded the sudden appearance of a "guest star" on 4th July 1054, describing it as being as bright as Venus and clearly visible in the daytime. Their records note that it remained visible for over 23 months. Japanese observers also documented

the event, noting its location and brilliance with similar precision.

Today, the expanding remains of this ancient explosion can still be seen located in the constellation Taurus. It was catalogued by Charles Messier in the 18th century as *Messier 1* as he sought to distinguish between permanent and transient celestial objects. Modern astronomers, using observations across the electromagnetic spectrum have confirmed the nebula's age and origin, linking it conclusively to the supernova of 1054.

To stand at Chaco Canyon, looking at a carved image left by people who saw this event with their own eyes nearly a thousand years ago, was a humbling reminder of how the night sky has always inspired observation and reflection.

As we move into autumn we have lots to look forward to. We have our Autumn conference on Sat 8 Nov 2025 at 10 am–4.30 pm at the Birmingham & Midland Institute. While the RSC History of Astrochemistry Conference being held with the SHA is on 16 October. We also have three forthcoming webinars for your diaries *Research Techniques* on Oct 7th, Peter Morris on *Henry Enfield Roscoe* on Nov 26th, and Dava Sobel on *Marie Curie* on Jan 26th 2026.

See you all in the autumn.

Carolyn  
SHA Chair



**Astronomical petroglyph in Chaco Canyon,  
New Mexico**



## CAMILLE FLAMMARION 100

The Astronomical Society of France (SAF) commissioned a bronze bust to commemorate the centenary of the death of the great populariser of astronomy, Camille Flammarion (1842-1925). This was [unveiled in the gardens](#) of his former observatory at Juvisy, near Paris, on Saturday 7 Jun 2025, in the presence of the Mayor of Juvisy (Lamia Bensarsa), the sculptor (Nacera Kainou), the president of the SAF (Roland Lehoucq), members of the ad-



**At the unveiling of the bust, mayor of Juvisy is in red and the sculptor, Nacera Kainou, is in the white shirt on the right** (*credit: SAF*)

ministrative Council and friends of the observatory.

The bust was placed on a base made of breccia from the Rochechouart impact crater (Haute-Vienne). The SHA made a contribution towards it.

## SHA ON THE ROAD

### Recent and future publicity events

The Society for the History of Astronomy continues to publicise its activities through events ranging from talks for local astronomical societies through to larger scale events such as astronomy shows. If you know of other forthcoming events at which the SHA might be able to have a publicity stand, or if you'd like materials to use at your local society meetings then please let the Publicity Officer, Geoff King, know via:

[publicity@shastro.org.uk](mailto:publicity@shastro.org.uk).

### Recent events

The SHA had stalls at the [Webb Deep-Sky Society annual meeting](#) at Cambridge in June, and at the [Liverpool MakeFest](#) in July.

### Forthcoming events

Later in the year we'll be at the International Astronomy Show on **Sat 1 Nov 2025**. This year it'll be at the Sports Connexion Leisure Club & Venue, which is based in Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire.



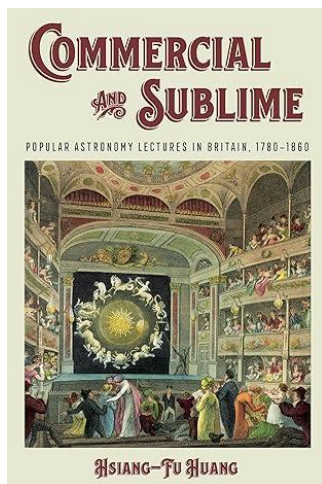
**Geoff King tending an SHA stall and book sale at the Webb Deep-Sky Society annual meeting (Institute of Astronomy, Sat 28 Jun 2025)**



**MakeFest - Emma Richards, Lord Mayor Cllr Barbara Ann Murray, and Gerard Gilligan at the SHA stall at Liverpool Makefest (5 July 2025)**

## FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

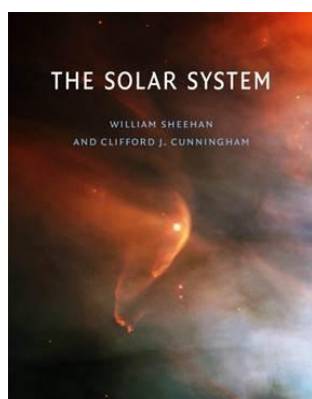
**Commercial and Sublime: Popular Astronomy Lectures in Nineteenth-Century Britain**, by Hsiang-Fu Huang (University of Pittsburgh Press), Nov 2025, pp. 336 (hardback, £65.00), ISBN 9780822948735. Paperback version also expected.



The astronomy lecturing trade in Britain experienced a theatrical turn in the early 1800s, as practitioners relied on larger and more elaborate visual aids to enhance the scenic and dramatic effects of their travelling spectacles. *Commercial and Sublime* explores this phenomenon in the long nineteenth century, a time when astronomical shows rose in popularity and the

lecturing trade developed a commercial side where business, profits, and competition took centre stage. Astronomy lecturing during this period, Hsiang-Fu Huang reveals, also heavily exploited the notion of the sublime, where displays and the rhetoric of awe and wonder meant to arouse religious sentiment by pointing to the sublimity of the universe and the Creator behind it. His book explores the various practitioners, sites, curriculums, apparatus, and audiences of popular astronomy lectures in nineteenth-century Britain, focusing specifically on those outside the scientific elite whose commercial endeavours opened up a flourishing market for various types of performances, including Lent shows in theatres, courses in learned or mechanics' institutes, and itinerant lectures around provincial towns and in the surrounding countryside.

**The Solar System**, by William Sheehan and Clifford J. Cunningham (Reaktion Books), Aug 2025, pp.408 (hardback, £25.00), ISBN 9781836390640

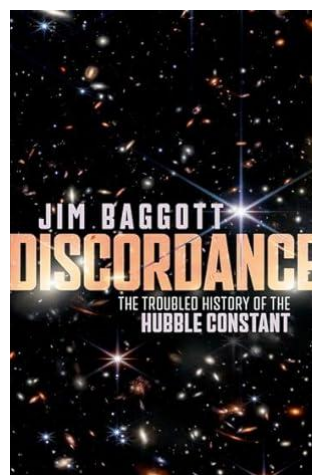


As recently as the dawn of the Space Age, the solar system was still largely unknown. The first probes to the Moon, Venus and Mars ushered in a golden age of planetary science, transforming planets from distant mysteries into vividly realized worlds. This book provides a comprehensive, accessible survey

of the entire solar system, covering all major planets from Mercury to Saturn, the outer solar system and

asteroids. It includes insights from leading scientists through in-person interviews, offering an engaging overview for general readers and amateur astronomers. Noting Earth's small, beautiful and precarious nature, this book fills a unique niche, presenting the latest discoveries without losing sight of the broader picture, making it essential for anyone interested in our celestial neighbourhood.

**Discordance: The Troubled History of the Hubble Constant**, by Jim Baggott (Oxford University Press), Oct 2025, pp.336 (hardback, £20.00), ISBN 9780192864062



The troubled history of the Hubble constant told in an authoritative, comprehensible, and entertaining manner

In 1927 Georges Lemaître argued that our universe is expanding, a conclusion rendered more startling by the astronomical data that backed it up, presented two years later by Edwin Hubble. The speed of this expansion is governed by

Hubble's constant, and *Discordance* tells its troubled history.

This unpredictable and fascinating story begins with the first tentative steps to measure the distances to nearby stars and galaxies. It traces the extraordinary interplay between cosmological theory and astronomical observation which has given us the standard Big Bang theory. It was not all plain sailing, and the narrative takes us through the discovery of dark matter, the Hubble Wars of the 1970s, the invention of cosmic inflation, and other crucial scientific moments. Further satellite missions were expected to add to the clarity of our measurements. But from about 2009 onward, the results began to diverge. This is the Hubble tension and perhaps even a crisis.

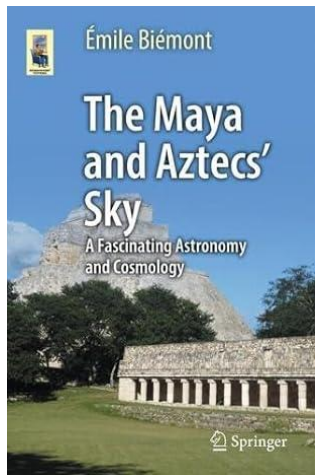
Jim Baggott clearly and entertainingly guides the reader through this gripping scientific voyage—one littered with crises of confidence, astonishing discoveries, and extraordinary personalities—which still continues today.

**The Maya and Aztecs' Sky: A Fascinating Astronomy and Cosmology**, by Émile Biémont (Springer), Sep 2025, pp.399 (paperback, £34.99), ISBN 9783031959660

This book immerses the reader in the fascinating history of the Mesoamerican peoples, Aztec and Maya in



particular. Although these two Mesoamerican cultures developed at very different periods, they present numerous convergences and similarities, from an attraction to ritual ball games to advanced astronomical knowledge and close intertwining of the lives of people and the observation of the sky.



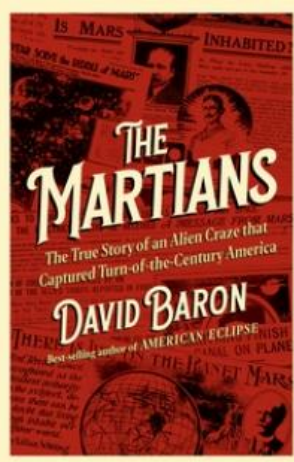
Astronomy provided a relationship between religious ideas and daily or seasonal agricultural practices and was therefore of major importance in Mesoamerican societies. This work highlights the importance of time-measuring devices and calendars used for planning of agricultural tasks during the different seasons and sacred rituals.

The history of the Aztec

and Maya people, strongly associated with legends and myths, is imbued with an astonishing and omnipresent spirituality which is discussed in detail in this work. The pantheon of these two peoples was very extensive, the religion often integrating the heritage of previous cultures in the same way that the empire appropriated the artisanal know-how of the conquered regions.

Amplly illustrated with photographs by the author and documents from codices, this book is aimed at a very wide audience, from enthusiasts of history, ethnology, and astronomy to students or researchers interested in the pre-Hispanic civilizations of Mexico.

**The Martians: The True Story of an Alien Craze that captured Turn-of-the-Century America**, by David Baron (WW Norton), Oct 2025, pp.336 (hardback, £23.00), ISBN 9781324090663



“There Is Life on the Planet Mars”—The New York Times, 9 December 1906.

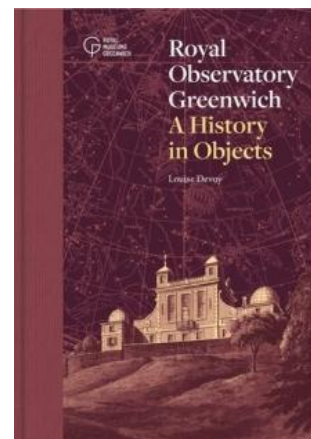
The New York Times headline was no joke. In the early 1900s, many believed intelligent life had been discovered on Mars. *The Martians* —a bizarre tale reconstructed through newly discovered clippings, letters and photographs—begins in the 1890s with Percival

Lowell, a Harvard scion who was so certain of his Mars discovery that he (almost) convinced a genera-

tion of astronomers that grainy photographs of the red planet revealed melt water and an intricate canal system, declaring “there can be no doubt that living beings inhabit our neighbouring world” (The New York Times).

So frenzied was the reaction that international controversies arose. Tesla announced he had received Martian radio signals, biologists debated whether Martians were winged or gilled and a new genre called science-fiction arose. While Lowell’s claims were debunked, his influence sparked a compulsive interest in Mars and life in outer space that continues to this day.

**The Royal Observatory, Greenwich: A History in Objects**, by Louise Devoy (Royal Observatory Greenwich), Oct 2025, pp.156 (hardback, £30.00), ISBN 9781906367916



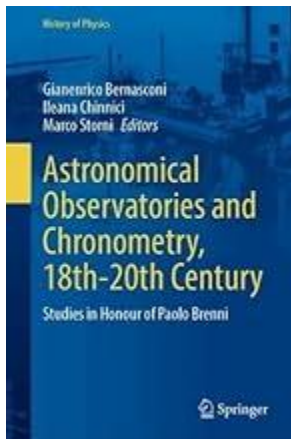
When King Charles II signed the royal warrant that led to the founding of the Royal Observatory in 1675, it was to ensure that Britain was not left behind other European nations as they pursued global trade and resources. Now, in its 350th year, the ‘small observatory within our park at Greenwich’ is perhaps the most famous such institution in the world,

home to the historic Prime Meridian of the World, 0° longitude, and an essential reference on our clocks, watches, maps and globes.

The objects contained within the pages of this book highlight the many people, ideas and technologies that contributed to ‘perfecting the art of navigation’ and mapping the stars. They include some of the most famous objects in the Royal Observatory’s collection, like John Harrison’s pioneering timekeepers, the Great Equatorial Telescope and the Shepherd Motor Clock, along with lesser-known items that document how our ideas about time and space have changed over the centuries. In addition, they reflect the Observatory’s varied functions: as a data service for stellar, lunar and planetary positions and timings; as a hub of global significance for leading researchers, intellectuals and craftsmen; as the site of early astrophotography; and even as a private home for the families of the Astronomers Royal.

**Astronomical Observatories and Chronometry, 18th-20th Century: Studies in Honour of Paolo Brenni**, eds. Gianenrico Bernasconi, Ileana Chinnici, Marco Storni (Springer), Sep 2025, pp.312 (hardback, £99.99), ISBN 9783031958731





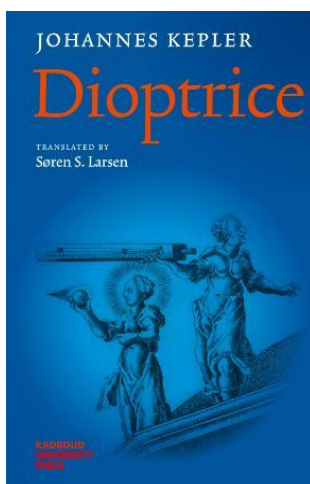
This book presents research perspectives and open questions on the intersections between astronomy and chronometry. Their study is of crucial importance to the new historiography of observatories. On the one hand, pendulums were fundamental tools for astronomical observation, as measuring time was essential to record the transit of

stars and organize astrographic charts. On the other hand, astronomical observation was the method employed for time determination before the introduction of atomic clocks in the mid-20th century. Chapters of this book cohere around 5 sections: starting from the 18th century, and going through the 19th and 20th, the relations between observatories and chronometry (and more generally between practices and materiality) are analyzed from the standpoint of the quest for precision, the certification of timepieces, the acquisition and use of specific apparatus, as well as the circulation of knowledge and of instruments on a global scale.

## RECENT BOOKS MISSED

**Dioptrice**, by Johannes Kepler (translated into English by Søren Larsen (Radboud University Press), May 2025, pp.456 (Open Access, **FREE pdf**, or hardback, €36.00), ISBN 9789465150703

Kepler's *Dioptrice* is a seminal work in the fields of optics and astronomy. Written in response to the ground-breaking telescopic discoveries announced by Galileo Galilei in March 1610, the *Dioptrice* contained the first theory of the telescope—a theory that Kepler was uniquely qualified to develop—and provided an essential foundation for modern geometrical optics.



In the preface, Kepler highlights several examples of the close links which, then as now, exist between optics and astronomy. His excitement about Galileo's new observations is palpable, especially the discoveries of the four moons orbiting Jupiter and the phases of Venus. Both discoveries lent crucial support to the Copernican system, of which Kepler had been an

ardent supporter since his days as a student in Tübingen.

The *Dioptrice* is available here in a complete English translation for the first time, along with an introduction and numerous notes to help guide the reader through Kepler's text.

**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

### Galilæana Studies

The first 2025 issue (XXII, No. 1/2025) of *Galilæana Studies in Renaissance and Early Modern Science* has now been published. It is available [here](#).

### Message of the Angles

The book *The Message of the Angles - Astrometry from 1798 to 1998. Proceedings of the International Spring Meeting of the Astronomische Gesellschaft, Gotha, May 11-15, 1998* was published as vol. 3 of the series 'Acta Historica Astronomiae', but has been out of print for a long time. Now it has now been digitized with searchable text and is [free to download](#).

### HAD News

The latest issue of the twice yearly *Newsletter of the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society* (No. 105, May 2025) is [now available for free download](#).

### History of Astronomy in Scotland

A reminder that David Gavine's 1982 Ph.D. thesis on *Astronomy in Scotland 1745-1900* (369 pages) has been scanned and is [available on the Open University website](#).

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

### Meeting on the History of Astrochemistry

Burlington House, Thur 16 October, 10 am – 5 pm

Sponsored by the RSC, the RAS and the SHA. [Details here.](#)

**Session One** (chair: John Nicholson)

Welcome from John Nicholson, Chair of the Historical Group

Ileana Chinnici, *Early History of Astronomical Spectroscopy*

Helge Kragh, *Element Abundances in the Stars and Beyond, ca. 1925-1940*

Simon Mitton, *Seven Steps to Element Synthesis: B2FH*

Jonathan Hare, *Carbon Astrochemistry and the Discovery of Buckminsterfullerene*

**Session Two** (chair: Jeremy Shears)

John Black, *Alexander Dalgarno and the Growth of Astrochemistry*

Jonathan Rawlings, *First Detection of Molecules in Space*

Glenn White, *The Development of Submillimetre Astronomy in the UK and Elsewhere*

**Session Three** (chair: Peter Morris)

Mike Edmunds, *A History of the Chemical Analysis of Extragalactic Systems*

David Carty, *Laboratory Astrochemistry*

**Closing remarks** by Peter Morris

## SHA SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Amazingly, membership subscriptions for the SHA had only increased by £1 from its inception in 2002 until 2024.

Faced with rising costs (especially postage and printing costs), however, the SHA 2024 AGM approved the following changes to subscription rates:

Concessions will continue, but will only apply to:

Under 18s or those in full-time education;

Low-income persons in receipt of state benefits (other than state pension).

The annual subscription rates, from 2025, shall be:

Standard: £25

Concession: £20

Household: £30

Institutional: £25

In addition the annual overseas postage supplement will be £15 for Europe and £30 for the rest of the World

The Council feels sure that members will be convinced that these rates are reasonable and represent excellent value for money.

### A treat: Sherwood Planetarium

It's always interesting, always a good family experience, to visit a planetarium. It's an ideal rainy-day option for any holiday. Since Tussauds closed their London Planetarium in 2010 to house their Marvel Super Heroes (!), the only planetarium in London is the excellent one at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. The UK's largest, the Sir Patrick Moore Planetarium, was opened by Patrick at the National Science Centre just outside Leicester in 2012.

It is a pleasure to draw your attention to a really innovative and superb £-multi-million planetarium and visitor attraction, the [Sherwood Observatory and Planetarium](#) at Sutton-in-Ashfield, set in beautiful countryside some 44 miles north



image credit: Sherwood Observatory & Planetarium)

of Leicester, or 15 miles north of Nottingham. The new 59-seat planetarium with two projectors is set above an excellent Science Centre display area (strong on manned spaceflight and solar system astronomy) housed in a converted former underground reservoir. The adjacent Observatory houses a 24-inch/61cm Newtonian telescope completed by the members in 1983 (new mirrors installed 2024), and offering open evenings October to March. There is an excellent café and good gift shop. The whole facility is the fund-raised vision

of, and run by, the friendly volunteers of the Mansfield and Sutton Astronomical Society.

Thoroughly recommended!

*Roger Hutchins*

## **Lincolnshire Explorers and Innovators**

**Sat 6 Sep 2025 10:00 AM - 4:30 PM**

**Walton Academy, Grantham NG31 7JR**

The Society for Lincolnshire History & Archaeology presents '[Lincolnshire Explorers and Innovators](#)' - a full day of fascinating talks, music, and stories celebrating Lincolnshire's global trailblazers, from eighteenth-century explorers to pioneering scientists, abolitionists, and reformers.

Included in the day is a talk on **Arthur Storer – America's First Colonial Astronomer** by Ruth Crook

---



## SHA CALENDAR 2025

MONTH	SHA EVENT OR PUBLICATION	VENUE
<b>2025</b>		
JAN	SHA Online Lecture No.19, by <b>Anna Marie Roos</b> (22 Jan)	via 'Zoom'
FEB	SHA e-News (1-5 Feb)	
MAR	SHA Online Lecture No.20, by <b>Bernie Taylor</b> (12 Mar) SHA-SAF Conference, Paris (28-30 Mar)	Via 'Zoom'
APR	SHA Spring Conference (26 Apr)	Birmingham
MAY	SHA e-News (1-5 May) SHA Bulletin 43 (May)	
JUN	The Antiquarian Astronomer 19 SHA Summer Picnic (27 Jun)	Jodrell Bank
JUL		
AUG	SHA e-News (1-5 Aug)	
SEP		
OCT	SHA Online Lecture No. 21, on Research Techniques (8 Oct)	
NOV	SHA e-News (1-5 Nov) SHA AGM & Autumn Conference (8 Nov) SHA Online Lecture No. 22, by <b>Peter Morris</b> (26 Nov)	Birmingham
DEC	SHA Bulletin 44 (mid-Dec)	
<b>2026</b>		
JAN	SHA Online Lecture No. 23, by <b>Dava Sobel</b> (14 Jan)	