SHA e-News

Society for the History of Astronomy

Volume 18, no.4, Nov 2026 **Editor: David Sellers**

International Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of Mars's Great Opposition of 1877 …and All It Brought

The year 2027 will mark 150 years since the great Mars opposition of 1877, at which Asaph Hall discovered the moons, David Gill observed the parallax in order to determine afresh the length of the astronomical unit from Ascension Island, and Giovanni Schiaparelli at the Brera Observatory and Nathaniel Green at Madeira produced rival maps of Mars. They could hardly have been more different—and perhaps this should have been a cautionary tale, as it suggested that subjective/stylistic effects were important in what was reported by different observers at the eyepiece. In the end, Schiaparelli's schematic map was far more influential than Green's, and so the canals burst upon the scene—and with them a preoccupation with the possibility that Mars might be inhabited that would last for at least thirty years.

An international celebration of the anniversary has been planned. For its part the SHA will be devoting part of its Spring Conference in April 2027 (a joint meeting with the Historical Commission of the Société Astronomique de France) to this topic.

JODRELL BANK STILL AT RISK?

The government has said it is "exploring" long-term options for Jodrell Bank Observatory, home to the UK's largest telescope, after its future was put at risk.

On 15th October, answering a question from Green Party MP, Hannah Spencer, Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds told the House of Commons that the facility had a "secure future" and he had recently met staff at the University of Manchester, which runs the project, to explore potential solutions.

The future of the historic radio telescope was put in doubt when the funding body - UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) - announced in July that the site in Cheshire would not be prioritised for further investment after its current agreement ends in March 2028.

Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, pledged in September that he would find a way to save the telescope.

Reynolds said: "The Prime Minister and I have been clear that Jodrell Bank has a secure future. Just to be clear with the House about what is happening, the primary radio astronomy project will move from the e-MERLIN radio telescope to the Square Kilometre Array observatory in March 2028. That was a science-based decision, but we are exploring the long-term options for the sustainability of Jodrell Bank."

The BBC World Service broadcast on 28 Sep 2026 an interesting programme on The birth of Jodrell Bank, in its Witness History series.



FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

2026 AGM & AUTUMN CONFERENCE

This will be on **Sat 7 Nov 2026** at **10 am–4.30 pm** in the Lyttleton Theatre of the Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St, Birmingham, B3 3BS. Conference: £20 members; £25 non-members.

The Autumn Conference will be loosely themed around "Subjects dear to Allan Chapman". Members will receive the AGM-related papers by email in advance.

Confirmed speakers are:

Gurbir Singh (Salford AS), *Allan Chapman, a friend, a mentor, and a paradox: The man of faith who taught me science*

Ross Code (ROG), *Goings on at the Observatory*

Bill Barton (SHA), *The Astronomical Society of India*

George Seabroke (UCL), *Francis Baily and his star catalogue*

2027 SPRING CONFERENCE

This will be on **Fri 23–Sun 25 Apr 2027** and will be a joint event with our sister organisation, the *Historical Commission of the Astronomical Society of France* (SAF). The conference on Saturday will be at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge, and will include as a theme *the 150th anniversary of the 1877 opposition of Mars*. The conference dinner (optional) will be at Murray Edwards College on Saturday evening. Visits and excursions will be on Friday and Sunday.

2027 SUMMER PICNIC

This will be provisionally on Wed 16 Jun 2027 at the Museum of Timekeeping, Upton Hall, Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire.

ONLINE MEETINGS

Free online evening presentations for members:

4 Nov 2026 - Dr Toner Stevenson, *Measuring the stars and observing the less visible: Australia's participation in the Astrographic Catalogue and Carte du Ciel 1887–1963*

9 Dec 2026 - Bernie Taylor, *Solstice Traditions*

20 Jan 2027 - Bob Garfinkle, *Some Astronomy in Classical Hohokam and Mimbres Locations*

17 Feb 2027 - Cathy Haynes, *Telling Time by the Stars*

SHA COUNCIL

The current SHA Officers & Council are:

Honorary Council Members

Hon President Prof. Mike Edmunds
Hon Vice-Presidents Dr Emily Winterburn, Dr Louise Devoy

Council Members

Chair Carolyn Kennett
Vice-Chair (& e-News Editor) David Sellers
General Secretary Mike Leggett
Treasurer Bill Barton
Asst. Treasurer Geoff King
Membership Secretary Graham Jones
SHA Bulletin Editor Kevin Walsh
Publicity Officer Gerard Gilligan
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:

Tue 12 Jan 2027, 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.

SHA PUBLICATIONS

SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early-Feb 2027. 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).


SHA e-News

JODRELL BANK STILL AT RISK?

MARS IS FOR ALL 2027

International Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of Mars's Great Opposition of 1877 ...and All It Brought

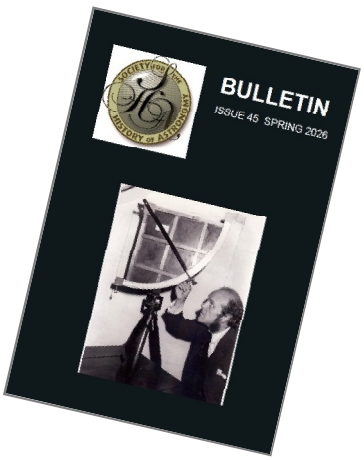
Back issues and guidelines for contributions are available from the *e-News* web page.

SHA BULLETIN

Issue 45 of the *Bulletin* (Spring 2026) (pictured) was distributed to SHA members in May 2026. **Issue 46** is due in Autumn 2026.

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

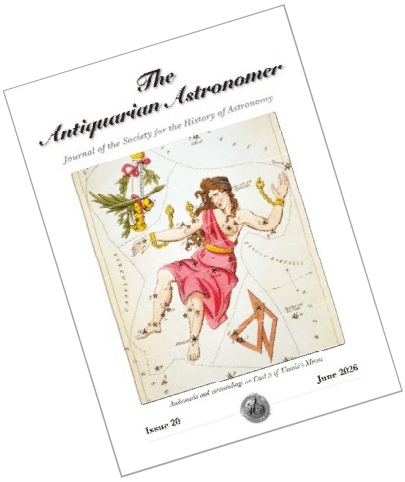
Back issues (except for the last 2 years) and guidelines for contributions are available from the *Bulletin* web page.



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 20 of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* was sent to all members in Jun 2026.



The subjects include: *Norman and Isis Pogson at the Madras Observatory 1861–1891* (Roger Hutchins); *Humphry Smith: The Rise and Sad End of the Royal Greenwich Observatory Time Department* (Timothy M. M. Baker); *The Two Oldest Existing US Observatories: A Re-examination* (Trudy E. Bell); *The International Astronomical Union and the Constellations* (Ian Ridpath); *Charles T. Whitmell and the Earliest Visibility of the New Moon* (David Sellers); *A Digital Astronomical Image from 1869?* (Thomas Hockey); and *Chester Moor Hall (1703–71) and Richard Hall Gower (1768–1833)* (Stephen Leach).

Issue 21 should be published in Jun/Jul 2027. 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*. A new Style Guide (Sep 2025) for authors and some back issues can be found on *The Antiquarian Astronomer* web page.

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 added to the catalogue is given below

Author, *Title*, Year

Alder, Ken, *The Measure of all things: the seven-year odyssey that transformed the world*, 2002

Christie's, *Scientific, Philosophical and Medical Instruments and by order of the Ministry of Defence Nine Halcyon 27 Cruising Yachts. South Kensington, Thursday, 29 November, 1990 at 2.00 p.m.*, 1990

Determann, Jorg Matthias, *Teaching Science Through Science Fiction*, 2026

Hogben, Lancelot, *Astronomer Priest & Ancient Mariner (The Beginnings of Science)*, 1972

Hussey, Christopher, *The Universities of Oxford & Cambridge. The Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford. [article from Country Life]*, 1930

Jones, Brian, *Yearbook of Astronomy 2026*, 2025

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.

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.



BMI (Birmingham): home of the SHA Library

NEW MEMBERS

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

Mrs Lisa Withers	**ROMSEY**
Mr Alan Hewitt	**TYNE & WEAR**
Mr Graham Lloyd	**BOSTON**
Miss Amanda Wiggan	**UPTON**
Miss Nova Elizabeth Wiggan	**UPTON**
Rev Terence Merrifield	**SOUTHAMPTON**
Dr Louise Devoy	**WATFORD**
Mr Steve Holmes	**BURRY PORT**
Mr Stewart Fraser	**TYNE & WEAR**
Dr David DeVorkin	**KENSINGTON USA**
Mrs Mary Rigby	**BRIDGWATER**
M. Etienne Cazin	**AUBERVILLIERS, FR**

Research Techniques Workshop

26 Sep 2026

report by Mike Frost

The Society for the History of Astronomy strongly encourages research by its membership. To assist with this, every few years we hold a Research Techniques workshop, where experienced researchers from the society share their knowledge with members who are just beginning their research journey.

The latest workshop took place on Saturday September 26th at the Birmingham & Midland Institute. Five mentors and six mentees met at the Institute, the society's home venue, in the newly refurbished Sir Arthur Sullivan Hall.

Our first presentation was by **Peter Morris**, editor of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* (TAA), and **Magda Wheatley**, who is the layout editor of this Journal. They spoke about "*How to write papers for journals*", with particular reference to TAA. Our membership is encouraged to write up their research for TAA, the SHA bulletin, e-News, or other journals.

This was followed by lunch in the BMI café; a great chance to discuss research projects, in-progress or proposed, with fellow historians. After lunch, **James Dawson**, the SHA librarian, took us through "*online searches*". As befits the SHA, he started with the library of Alexandria and ended up with Artificial Intelligence. AI was a theme of the day: Is it ethical to use? What are the pitfalls? How productive is it to use? The consensus was that AI gives us a new and powerful tool for our research, but one which can produce spurious results. Use with care!

Next up was **Kevin Johnson**, taking us through the SHA's primary online resource, *the County Survey*. This extensive website is a boon to researchers, but the information requires organising for clarity, so Kevin explained how the survey was structured. He took us through several case studies, and concluded with a suggested research project, chasing up the many leads in the doctoral thesis of the late Dave Gavine.

After a coffee break and more networking, our final presentation was by **David Sellers**, on "*Choosing and Developing a Subject*". David gave several fascinating case studies from his own research. A particularly interesting theme was how secondary sources could give clues about the existence of otherwise unknown primary sources. David concluded with a quote from a paper by two of the most eminent figures in our field, Michael Hoskin and Owen Gingerich, "On writing the history of Modern Astronomy":

"*The prime duty of the historian of astronomy is to illuminate his/her science as a creative human activity of the astronomical community of the time*"

…a timely reminder of what we strive to do in our society.

Great day! Thanks to all our mentors.

Mike Frost

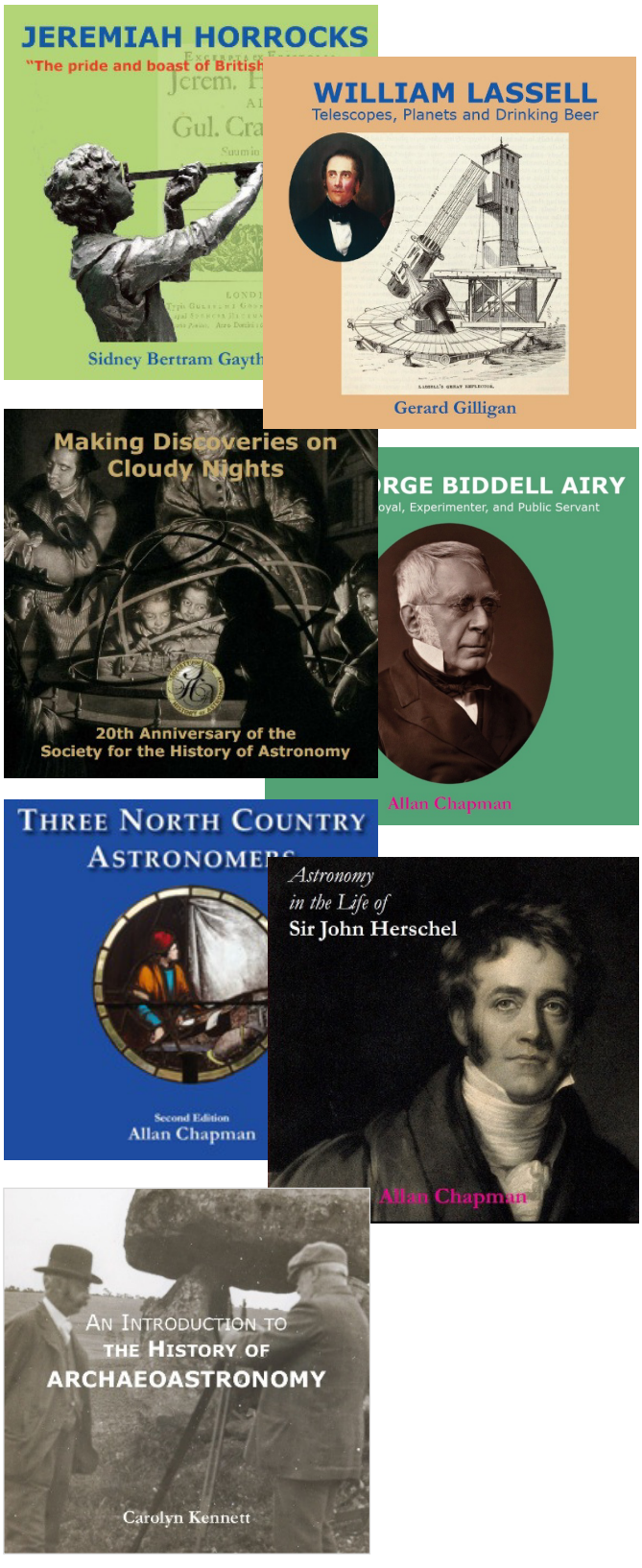


Participants in the SHA Research Techniques workshop in Birmingham on 26 Sep 2026

SHA BOOKLET SERIES

Seven titles in the SHA's occasional booklet series have been published so far: one on ***Jeremiah Horrocks*** (2020), by Sidney Bertram Gaythorpe; one on ***William Lassell*** (2021), by Gerard Gilligan; one for the ***SHA 20th Anniversary*** (2022) by various authors; one on ***Sir George Biddell Airy*** (2023), by Allan Chapman; a revised edition of ***Three North Country Astronomers*** (2024), by Allan Chapman; one on ***Astronomy in the Life of Sir John Herschel***, by Allan Chapman (2025), and one on ***Archaeoastronomy*** (2026) by Carolyn Kennett. The prices have recently been made uniform: £8.00 each when bought in person at SHA stalls, or £10.00 per booklet and £5 p&p for UK mail orders (overseas orders - postage extra). For mail order, please visit our online bookshop.

If you wish to suggest topics and/or authors for the future, please let the Editor know (David Sellers).



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.

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR



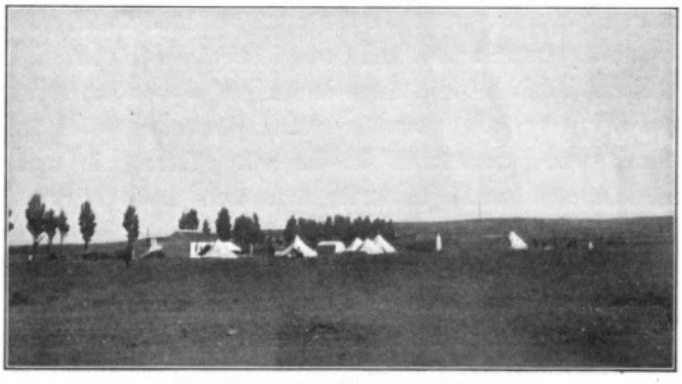
As we head into autumn, it's a great time to share all the wonderful things we have coming up.

On 7 November, from 10 am to 4.30 pm, we'll be back at the BMI for our AGM and Autumn Conference, and I'm looking forward to seeing many of you in person. The conference will be themed around "Subjects dear to Allan Chapman". Alongside our stellar line-up, the library will be open, and there will be plenty of opportunities to catch up and chat during lunchtime and the breaks.

If I don't see you in person, I hope to see you online at one of our upcoming webinars. Our next webinar takes place on Wednesday 4 November 2026 at 8 pm with Dr Toner Stevenson speaking about *Measuring the stars and observing the less visible: Australia's participation in the Astrographic Catalogue and Carte du Ciel 1887–1963.* The previous webinar, held on Wednesday 14 October 2026, is now available to watch on our YouTube channel: If you missed it this is well worth the catch up. The talk by Hugh Allen was *Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: The life and work of William and Margaret Huggins.*

During the summer, like many of you, I headed off to see the eclipse. I had been particularly looking forward to this one because one of my historical astronomy heroes, Mary Proctor, had witnessed the total solar eclipse of 1905 from Burgos in Spain, the very same location I was planning to visit.

Of course, much has changed since Mary described the city, but the excitement and international interest she wrote about felt remarkably familiar. Space in the tavernas was at a premium, and the hotels were packed with enthusiastic eclipse chasers. Unlike our experience, when we were blessed with incredibly clear skies on the day, there was a little more edginess and nervousness as Mary's group in 1905 waited to see what the weather would bring.



THE ASTRONOMERS' CAMP AT BURGOS.

By her third total eclipse, Mary Proctor had already proved herself quite the adventurer, organising a tour from the USA for those interested in joining her. Her account of the build-up to the eclipse and the event itself gives us a wonderful glimpse into the experience of eclipse chasing more than a century ago.

These are her words describing the excitement in Burgos:

"The 'eclipse-week' in Burgos was one of intense excitement for all concerned, spectators as well as astronomers, and the hospitality of the little village was taxed to its utmost. The rooms in the only hotels—three in number—were engaged months ahead, and exorbitant prices were charged, generally £30 ($150) per head and upwards."

"Hundreds thronged to the station to get a glimpse of us. The streets were lined with the curious; and women sitting by the roadside with children in their arms, men of swarthy aspect brigand type, and dark-eyed Spanish maidens with roses in their black hair and with mantillas coquettishly draped around their heads, added to the picturesqueness of the scene."

"The astronomers continued their preparations, although many a one felt anxious and discouraged as he gazed at the grey sky heavily massed with clouds. Was this the Burgos of which they had heard, "where blue skies were promised without fail, and clouds were unusual?" For nearly two weeks, during which the astronomers had been making their preparations, cloudy skies had been the daily programme, and there seemed little chance of any change on August 30."

"When it was a little more than half eclipsed, the clouds drifted over it, hiding it completely from view, and again our hopes went down to zero…Meanwhile, the sky near the western horizon assumed a purplish hue."

"The northwestern sky was flooded with a vivid orange tint streaked with a few silvery clouds as at dawn. The mountains in the distance were partially shrouded in mist, their summits being dimly visible in the faint light….Darker and darker grew the scene, the storm clouds overhead assuming a purplish hue, the edges fading from purple into an amber tint of wondrous beauty. A few seconds before totality the rain fell, and then our attention was called to the rainbow colours on a small cloud about five degrees from the sun.



WAITING FOR THE MOMENT OF TOTALITY.
At the left may be seen the mounted officers on guard.

At the last moment all the clouds parted and offered everyone a clear view and

"All too quickly sped the three minutes and forty-five seconds…

As soon as the eclipse was over, a universal sound of cheerfulness pervaded the camp, and the cathedral bells could be heard in the distance…East, west, north, and south the news of our success was flashed by cable all over the world."

Quotes and images from Mary Proctor, Giant Sun and His Family *(1906).*

Hope to see you all soon

Carolyn

SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA *Small Research Grants* are available for the period **1 Nov 2026 to 31 Oct 2027** 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).

SHA SUBSCRIPTION RATES

The current annual subscription rates are:

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.

Concessions only apply to:
Under 18s or those in full-time education;
Low-income persons in receipt of state benefits (other than state pension).

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 our Publicity Officer know.

Recent events

The SHA successfully publicised its activities through a stall or leaflet distribution at:

18-19 Sep 2026 *BAA Autumn Meeting* in Liverpool

Future events

The SHA will have stalls at:

31 Oct 2026 *The International Astronomy Show*, Sports Connexion, Leamington Road, Dunsmore, Coventry (entry free)

Do drop by to say 'hello', if you are there. If you are available to help at any stall, please contact Gerard to let him know.

In March the Society produced a new updated publicity trifold leaflet based on the original design by James Dawson, but updated and improved by Peter Morris and Magda Wheatley. Copies of these leaflets for distribution are available on request for SHA members who may be attending local or national society meetings, events or astronomy fairs (contact the SHA publicity Officer Gerard Gilligan: publicity@shastro.org.uk)



Reports and short articles concerning past SHA events and meetings have appeared in *The Federation of Astronomical Societies (FAS) Newsletter* (no. 150 Oct 2026), and *Astronomy Now* magazine (Oct 2026).

MALCOLM ASTLEY

We are sad to report the death on 11 Oct 2026 of Malcolm Astley, one of the founder members of the SHA, at the age of 98.

For more than 30 years Malcolm was the Secretary of Wolverhampton Astronomical Society. He was responsible for a web-based history of the society, which is still accessible.

Unfortunately, in recent years he became a designated blind and deaf person, which made contact extremely difficult. His funeral is set for Monday 16th November 2026, 2.00 pm, Bushbury Crematorium, West Chapel, Wolverhampton

ASTEROID (21420) Steinicke = 1998 FL74

We are delighted to note that SHA member Wolfgang Steinicke has had an asteroid named after him. The citation reads:

Discovery: *1998-03-21 / W. Bickel / Bergisch Gladbach / 621*

Wolfgang Steinicke *(b. 1952) is a German physicist and historian of astronomy, and a core member of the International Revised NGC/IC Project. His research focuses on the history of deep-sky observation, the Herschel family, and Dreyer's catalogues. He has authored several monographs and numerous papers and published the latest RNGC/IC online.*

SHA SURVEY

The summer period has been very quiet with a single addition to the survey from regular contributor Bill Barton.

Bill provided the details of John Sumsion Townsend (c.1834–1902), a shipping clerk who later became a merchant for trade with Spain. Townsend had an interest in astronomy, and was an original member of the British Astronomical Association. A solar observer, he used a telescope with 4.5-inch object glass, submitting his observations to the solar section of the BAA. His details have been added to the 'Astronomers' page for Kent as he resided in the town of Sevenoaks, but probably worked in London offices.

Changes in the WordPress platform, which hosts the Survey, have required certain new procedures for creating new records and updating existing ones. The long-term implications of these changes should be discussed at council to agree whether we wish to continue to use WordPress or explore alternative options.

As mentioned previously, it is proposed that we launch a project to identify Scottish astronomers for the Survey. The source will be from the appendix of the thesis of the late David Gavine listing people associated with astronomy—teachers, navigators, mathematicians, etc.

Overall traffic (views/visitors) on the Survey site shows an increase for the reporting period, with views up 35% while visitors were up 66%. The overall trend, year on year, since 2020 is still upwards. Most hits for the site are through search engines. Visitors are predominantly from the UK, followed by English-speaking countries (USA, Canada & Australia), European countries (Germany 3rd), with India and Thailand.

Kevin Johnson - Survey Coordinator

FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

An Awesome Universe: From the First Stargazers to Modern Cosmology, by William Sheehan and Chris Conselice (University of Arizona Press), May 2027, pp.410 (paperback, c.£28.00), ISBN 9780816556137



This exploration of humanity's quest to understand the cosmos spans the earliest observations of the night sky to the latest revelations from advanced space telescopes. It is about humans as much as stars, galaxies, black holes, dark matter, and dark energy.

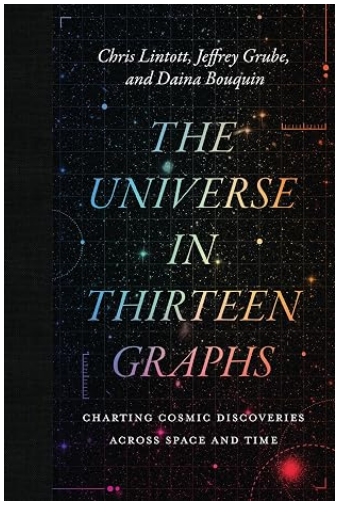
Written by an award-winning historian of astronomy and a professional astronomer specializing in galaxy formation in the early Universe, this book provides a comprehensive narrative of cosmic discovery. It examines the evolution of our understanding of the Universe—from the first glimpses of the stars to the recognition of the Milky Way as a spiral galaxy and the realization that our Universe is filled with countless other galaxies. The book also explores the revolutionary advancements in astrophysics that have shaped our knowledge, including quantum mechanics, nuclear physics, and the study of the still mysterious dark matter and dark energy.

Richly illustrated with remarkable images that show the scale of the Universe—from the ancient sky to the ten trillion galaxies now known to exist—*An Awesome Universe* also addresses some of the most profound questions in science: the nature of life beyond Earth, the fate of the universe, and whether we will ever fully understand the mysteries of space-time, the Big Bang, and the possibility of a multiverse.

This authoritative and visually captivating work offers readers a glimpse into the "Big Picture" of the cosmos, framed by the contributions of pioneering astronomers and driven by our ongoing quest for knowledge about our place in the universe.

The Universe in Thirteen Graphs, by Chris Lintott, Jeffrey Grube, and Daina Bouquin (University of Chicago Press), Feb 2027, pp.232 (hardback, £21.00), ISBN 9780226780498

See the Universe as astronomers do: These thirteen graphs distill the cutting-edge discoveries of the cosmos—from planets and stars to galaxies, to ripples

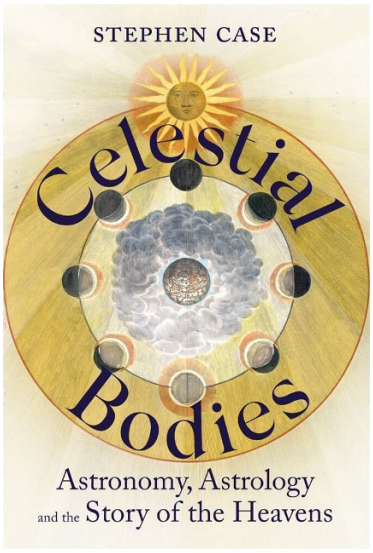


in spacetime itself.

From the front page of newspapers to your favourite t-shirt, the visual language of the cosmos is pervasive. Yet while you may have seen stunning images of planets, nebulae, and even the shadow of a black hole, pretty pictures alone cannot reveal the Universe. Whether you're looking for planets outside our solar system, searching for dark matter, listening for ripples in spacetime, or looking back to very early times, to truly understand the cosmos you need graphs.

In this fully illustrated and engaging book, Lintott, Grube and Bouquin focus on thirteen graphs to offer a tour of the major astronomical discoveries of the last century. Meet the HR diagram, which tells us about stellar lives; marvel at the Hubble diagram's evidence for the expansion of the Universe; understand special relativity through Minkowski spacetime; and turn back time to the earliest visible light of the cosmic microwave background. With fascinating stories of discovery and accessible science for understanding ongoing debates, this book proves that while a picture may be worth a thousand words, a graph can show you the Universe.

Celestial Bodies: Astronomy, Astrology and the Story of the Heavens, by Stephen Case (Reaktion Books), Mar 2027, pp.336 (hardback, £20.00), ISBN 9781836393443

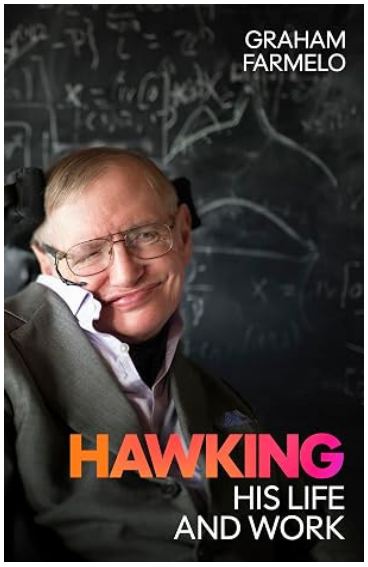


A jargon-free history of the shifting relationship between astronomy and astrology.

For most of human history, the study of celestial bodies and their earthly influence was not distinguished. Although the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century sounded the death knell for the foundational sway of astrology, many prominent early scientists took it seriously, casting horoscopes while conducting scientific experiments. The notion that celes-

tial influence could be mapped onto human lives only slowly became a fringe belief. Stephen Case deftly explores how astrology transformed from a primary motivation to study astronomy to the pseudoscience that it is today. Only by understanding astrology's role in astronomy's development can we fully come to understand the complete story of humanity's relationship with the stars.

Hawking: His Life and Work, by Graham Farmelo (John Murray Press), Sep 2026, pp.608 (hardback, £30.00) ISBN 9781529339338



An insatiable curiosity and appreciation for life powered Stephen Hawking to the furthest reaches of the Universe and human achievement: during his remarkable lifetime he shed light on many of the mysteries of black holes and made key contributions to our understanding of the beginnings of the Universe, all while captivating the world and selling more than 25 million copies of *A Brief History of Time*.

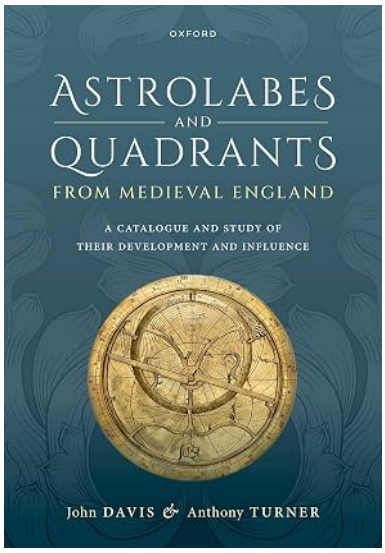
A brilliant theoretical physicist, Hawking lived one of the most extraordinary lives of the past century. And yet, none of this should have been possible. Aged 21, he was given only a few years to live – and spent the next fifty-five showing what can be achieved despite near-hopeless odds.

Drawing on his parents' previously unseen letters and diaries, and exclusive interviews with Stephen's family, friends and closest colleagues, Graham Farmelo reveals the complex man behind the theories and global celebrity – and the resilience, fortitude and support that enabled him to defy his life-limiting diagnosis.

Vividly told and rigorously researched, *Hawking* is the definitive portrait of an exceptional man and extraordinary intellect.

Astrolabes and Quadrants from Medieval England: A Catalogue and Study of Their Development and Influence, by John Davis and Anthony Turner (Oxford University Press), Dec 2026, pp.496 (hardback, £150.00), ISBN 9780197916650

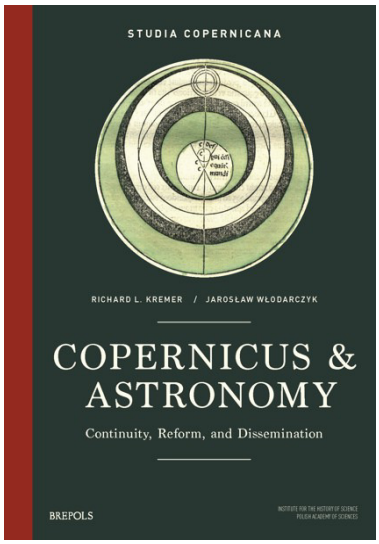
The book presents a detailed description of all known astrolabes and quadrants made in England in the Middle Ages, placing these instruments within their historical context. It analyses the socio-cultural and intellectual situation in England in the Early Middle Ages, which allowed astronomical instrument manufacture to develop and flourish in the fourteenth century.



With additional consideration of the political situation in England and northern Europe during this period, including the Black Death and the beginning of the 100 Years War, the text also develops a series of interlocked hypotheses regarding the instruments' makers, owners and commissioners, revealing the influence of English instruments in continental Europe. The tools used to make these instruments are also described: these are largely undated and unsigned, but by reverse-engineering their designs and studying their metallurgy for the first time it is possible to assign likely dates of manufacture.

Including seven specialized appendices and an extensive bibliography, the book is a detailed and copiously illustrated catalogue of all surviving Medieval English astrolabes and quadrants placed in their historical, social, and technical context.

Copernicus and Astronomy: Continuity, Reform, and Dissemination, by Richard Kremer and Jaroslaw Wlodarczyk (eds) (Brepols), Oct 2026, pp. 362 (hardback, €135.00 (ex VAT)), ISBN 9782503623399



The studies collected in this book focus on three main themes. The first theme addressed is geocentric astronomy, its methods and the twists and turns of its evolution, beginning with the classical form given to it by Claudius Ptolemy in the second century CE to the astronomy taught at medieval and renaissance universities and practiced in independent research centres, such as Nuremberg, and therefore the

astronomy which Copernicus had studied before he developed his own world model. The theme also encompasses research on the development of astronomy outside Europe and the influence of astronomical treatises originating in Islamic countries on European science. The second theme focuses specifically on Copernicus's work and on attempts to identify the original impulse which spurred the creation of heliocentric astronomy. The third theme is an overview of the early reception of heliocentric astronomy in Europe, both with regard to cosmological concepts and mathematical solutions originating in *De revolutionibus*, and an analysis of the influence of Copernicus's planetary models on the procedures for calculating astronomical tables. The book thus aims to create a multidimensional synthesis of modern Copernican research.

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.*

KEW OBSERVATORY FOR SALE

Kew Observatory at Richmond occupies an important place in the annals of astronomy. It was built for George III in time for the king, his astronomical assistant, Stephen Demainbray, and a royal entourage to observe the 1769 transit of Venus. Subsequently, it was associated with advances in astronomical observation, precision timekeeping and meteorology.



Kew Observatory (Wikipedia, Andy Scott)

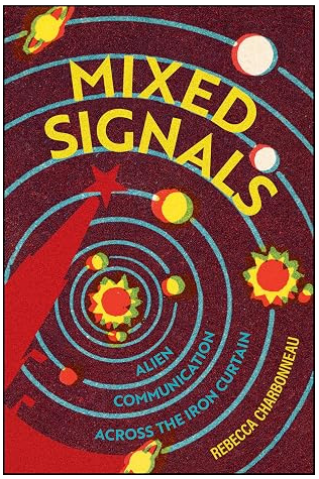
Situated in beautiful landscaped parkland—designed by "Capability Brown" and partly having Scheduled Monument status—one would imagine that this Grade I listed building would make a superb visitor attraction for West London. In September 2026, however, the freshly renovated building went up for sale, with a guide price of £18 million.

Let us hope that the new owners will occasionally allow public visits to this historic asset.

2027 OSTERBROCK BOOK PRIZE

The Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) has announced (24 Sep) that historian Dr Rebecca Charbonneau will receive the *2027 Donald E. Osterbrock Book Prize for Historical Astronomy* for her book Mixed Signals: Alien Communication Across the Iron Curtain.

Awarded biennially, the Osterbrock Prize honours a book judged to "advance the field of the history of astronomy or to bring the history of astronomy to light."



ROYAL OBSERVATORY GREENWICH

By the time this issue of *SHA e-News* appears, the last chance for some time to visit this iconic home of British astronomy will be upon us. The ROG closes on **2 Nov 2026** for extensive works as part of the First Light project (see *SHA e-News*, Nov 2024). It will not reopen until the summer of 2027.

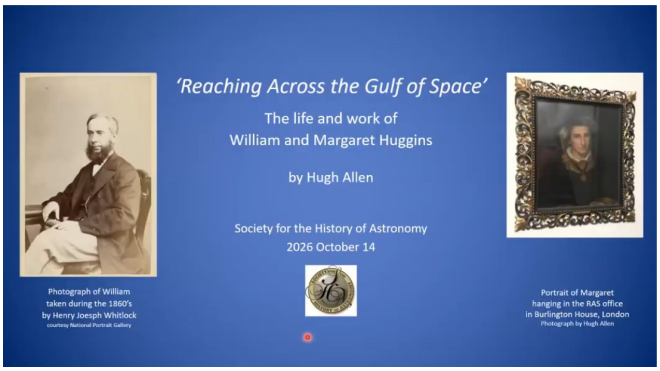
CHARLES MOLLAN (1942–2026)

We note with regret that the well-known Irish historian of science Charles Mollan died in Dublin on 7 Sep 2026, aged 83. He was perhaps best known to historians of astronomy for editing the definitive work *William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse: Astronomy and the Castle in Nineteenth-century Ireland*, published in 2014 by Manchester University Press and the Royal Dublin Society.

WEB-LINKS NOTICED

Reaching Across the Gulf of Space: Life & Work of William and Margaret Huggins

The brilliant talk by Hugh Allen during the 14 Oct 2026 SHA webinar is now available to watch.



Lübeck Astronomical Clock

Since winter 2024, the astronomical clock at the medieval basilica of St Marien in Lübeck, Germany, has been in need of repair, meaning that the figures do not rotate and the date display is not entirely accurate. A team of volunteer specialists is currently working on deciphering the construction plans and will soon have the astronomical clock up and running again. As part of the project, a visual simulation has been produced, which SHA members will find fascinating.



(image: Wikimedia Commons, Dguendel)

The astronomical clock was built between 1955 and 1967 by Paul Behrens. Its face is a simplified replica of the old clock from the 16th century, which was destroyed in a bombing raid in 1942.

Every day at 12 noon, the figures in the upper part of the astronomical clock move around.

In 2013/2014, the Astronomical Clock underwent renovation work over a period of eight months. The total cost amounted to €125,000, financed by numerous donations.

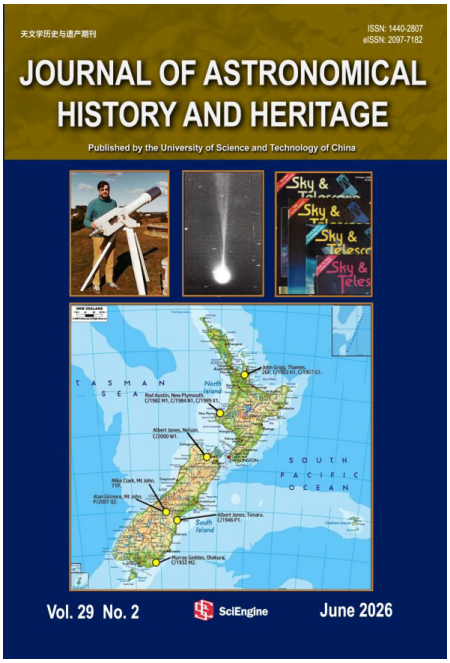
The astronomical clock was dismantled into its constituent parts. The clockwork had malfunctioned and the entire clock had to be cleaned.

An explanatory video showing the mechanical principles of the clock was produced in Sep 2026 by Dr Thomas Müller and a team of volunteers and can be seen on *YouTube*.

Mike Edmunds tells us that the team are working to establish exactly what definition of the zodiacal constellations the clock restorers used, although it may have been the 1930 IAU definitions.

Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage

The June 2026 (vol. 29, no. 2) issue of the Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage is now available for free download. See Contents list at the end of this SHA e-News.



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

Biennial History of Astronomy Workshop (ND XVII)

We anticipate the next Biennial History of Astronomy Workshop (ND XVII) will take place on 23–26 Jun 2027, at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. Details will be posted when available. Meanwhile, a new workshop website has been created.

The call for individual paper and session proposals will be announced sometime in the latter part of 2026.

145 Years of Astronomy on Merseyside: Liverpool Astronomical Society (1881–2026)

Until December 24th 2026: 9am–8pm Mon–Fri & 9am–5pm Sat, Third Floor, Liverpool Central Library, William Brown Street

Special Anniversary Exhibition and Archive Display.

The Liverpool Astronomical Society is one of the oldest in Great Britain. For 145 years it has enabled amateur astronomers to meet, communicate observations, and discuss the construction and use of telescopes, while promoting the science of astronomy to the wider public.





To help celebrate this special anniversary, a small but significant free exhibition and display has now opened. It traces some important stages in the story of the society. In the first 10 years of its formation, the society fundamentally changed how amateur astronomy was organised in this country and the wider world.

Its early success and longevity are demonstrated with the display of selected items from the society archives with the kind cooperation of the Liverpool Record Office and Archives.

Special Thanks to Vicki

For further information, please contact historian@liverpoolas.org

(*Images courtesy of Gerard Gilligan*)

BAA Historical Section

It is anticipated that the next BAA Historical Section meeting will be in Preston on Sat 26 Jun 2027, almost 100 years to the day after the solar eclipse of 29 Jun 1927, the last-but-one total solar eclipse visible from mainland Britain.

Otley Science Festival, Yorkshire

Thu 12 Nov 2.30pm Professor Mike Edmunds: *Sir Isaac Remembers...*

Professor Mike Edmunds brings Sir Isaac Newton to life, exploring his science, personal life and lesser-known interests.

Fri 13 Nov 7.30pm Professor Mike Edmunds: *The Antikythera Mechanism*

Discover the ancient Greek Antikythera Mechanism, its remarkable astronomical functions and its role in our understanding of the Universe.

NB. Both events require booking (advance price is £12 per event).

SHA CALENDAR 2026–27

MONTH	SHA EVENT OR PUBLICATION	VENUE
2026		
JAN	SHA Online Lecture No. 23, by **Dava Sobel** (14 Jan)	via 'Zoom'
FEB		
MAR	SHA Online Lecture No. 24, by **James Krehbiel** (17 Mar)	via 'Zoom'
APR	SHA Spring Conference (24 Apr)	Birmingham
MAY	SHA e-News (1-5 May) SHA Bulletin 45 (May)	
JUN	The Antiquarian Astronomer 20 SHA Summer Picnic (13-15 Jun)	 Ireland
JUL		
AUG	SHA e-News (1-5 Aug)	
SEP	Research Techniques Workshop (26 Sep)	Birmingham
OCT	SHA Online Lecture No. 25, by **Hugh Allen** (14 Oct)	via 'Zoom'
NOV	SHA Online Lecture No. 26, by **Toner Stevenson** (4 Nov) SHA e-News (1-5 Nov) SHA AGM & Autumn Conference (7 Nov)	via 'Zoom' Birmingham
DEC	SHA Online Lecture No. 27, by **Bernie Taylor** (9 Dec) SHA Bulletin 46 (mid-Dec)	via 'Zoom'
2027		
JAN	SHA Online Lecture No. 28, by **Bob Garfinkle** (20 Jan)	via 'Zoom'
FEB	SHA Online Lecture No. 29, by **Cathy Haynes** (17 Feb)	via 'Zoom'

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