Saturday 18 April saw wonderful weather for a trip to Cambridge and a great day for a fine tribute to be paid both by former colleagues and by members of the Society for the History of Astronomy to one of the most respected members of the UK astronomical community, Dr. David Dewhirst.

Dr. Dewhirst worked as a librarian and astronomer at the Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge, England, from 1950-1993, and it was most appropriate that this special SHA meeting be held on his home turf, thanks to the kind hospitality of the Institute of Astronomy and the organisational skills of SHA members Peter D. Hingley and Mark Hurn, who put together a remarkably diverse, informative, enjoyable, surprising and occasionally scandalous programme of lectures relevant both to Dr. Dewhirst and to the day's more general theme of Books and the Sky.

The meeting was the ideal opportunity to honour a distinguished astronomer, scholar and librarian who has been an inspiration to many over a long career, and someone who has also taken the time to become a member of the Society for the History of Astronomy.

A full report will appear in a future issue of the new SHA Bulletin, but suffice to say for the moment that the meeting was both very enjoyable and a worthy tribute to the man which it honoured.

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THE ANTIQUARIAN ASTRONOMER

Following the inaugural meeting of the new SHA Publications Working Group on 25 April, I am pleased to be able to report that while the delayed fifth issue of The Antiquarian Astronomer is still being worked on by Dr. Reg Withey, it is hoped that it will now go to press by the end of May for publication in June.
SHA BULLETIN: PROGRESS REPORT

As we have previously advised, the SHA Newsletter has been replaced with two complementary publications: the SHA e-News which you are now reading, and a Bulletin.

The SHA Bulletin will carry similar material to the former Newsletter, but with less emphasis on the dissemination of timely information, such as details of forthcoming events and other announcements.

The Bulletin will be published twice per year, in the spring and autumn. Preparation of the spring issue is now well advanced. All the material has been prepared and the pages are currently being laid-out. We anticipate that the spring issue will be available for distribution by mid-to-late May.

The actual date of distribution may depend on progress with The Antiquarian Astronomer (AA). If it seems likely that the AA will be ready for distribution around the end of May or early June we may delay distribution of the Bulletin so that the two publications can be posted together.

This ploy would both save postage and reduce the burden on our long-standing volunteer envelope-stuffer, Peter Hingley.

Clive Davenhall, Editor, SHA Bulletin

Space Snippets

GALILEO EXHIBITION IN FLORENCE

To commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the telescope the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence is mounting the exhibition Galileo: Images of the Universe from Antiquity to the Telescope. The exhibition will run from 13 March to 30 August 2009. For details see URL: http://www.galileofirenze.it/index.jsp?idProgetto=2

The Museum of the History of Science, Oxford has loaned items for this exhibition and has produced a broadsheet with details of the exhibition and the items lent. It can be retrieved from:

http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/events/docs/BroadSheet8.pdf

NASA APOD - 17 APRIL 2009

NASA’s Astronomy Picture of the Day (APOD) website usually carries a striking image from contemporary astronomy.

The entry for 17 April 2009 is somewhat different; it shows a page from an astronomical manuscript dating from 1490. The manuscript was discovered in Melk Abbey, Austria and contains lecture notes on astronomy. The page shown includes diagrams illustrating the Ptolemaic system, solar and lunar eclipses and a chart to calculate the date of Easter. See: http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090417.html

TELESCOPE 400 - 26 JULY 2009

During 2009, the International Year of Astronomy, Telescope 400, sponsored by the Royal Astronomical Society, are celebrating the 400th anniversary of Thomas Harriot’s telescopic observations of the Moon, which took place at Syon Park in Brentford, Middlesex, on 26 July 1609.

With exhibitions, demonstrations, ‘rocket building’ and other exciting activities, it will be a great day for all the family.

See www.telescope400.org.uk for more details. House admission costs apply.

PHILATELICALLY WILL GET YOU EVERYWHERE

You could be forgiven in the age of email for forgetting the very strong connection between the history of astronomy and the world of philately - the study of postage stamps and postal systems.

In fact, ‘astrophilately’ is a very interesting subset of that other popular but often unsung hobby, stamp collecting. And the International Year of Astronomy is probably a very good time to begin collecting astronomy stamps, if you have a few pounds to spend on expanding your astro-historical horizons, postage-wise.

The best place to start is Ian Ridpath’s excellent website: http://www.ianridpath.com/stamps/stampindex.htm where you’ll find out that the first ever astronomy stamp was issued in Brazil as far back as 1884! For more info, see also: http://www.astrophilately.com

Clive Davenhall, Editor, SHA Bulletin
FRIDAY 8 MAY 10:30-13:30:
RAS SPECIALIST DISCUSSION MEETING - MARS BEFORE THE SPACE AGE

Royal Astronomical Society Lecture Theatre, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BQ (www.ras.org.uk). Organiser & Chair, Barrie W Jones (b.w.jones@open.ac.uk). Co-organiser Peter Hingley (pdh@ras.org.uk). Admission: RAS members free, £15 non-members, £5 students.

Programme
10:30-10:40 Introduction to the meeting: Mars today Barrie W Jones (The Open University)
10:40-11:00 Chinese observations 200 BC to 1400 AD Richard Stephenson (Durham University)
11:00-11:20 Tycho Brahe & Johannes Kepler Ian Morison (Jodrell Bank)
11:20-11:40 Telescope observations up to 1877 Allan Chapman (Wadham College, Oxford)
11:40-12:00 The canals/canali of Mars David Strauss (Kalamazoo College, Michigan)
12:00-12:20 Water on Mars Colin Pillinger (The Open University)
12:20-12:40 Mars in pre-Space Age science fiction Stephen Baxter (science fiction author)
12:40-13:00 Mars from Earth in the decades up to 1970 Audouin Dollfus (Paris Observatory)
13:00-13:20 Mariners 4, 6, 7, & 9 John Murray (The Open University)

Dollfus’s talk will be delivered by A N Other

FILMS & DISPLAYS:
Old SciFi Films of Mars, Clive Davenhall, showing at 10:00-10:30, 13:15-14:00. Space Art of Mars, David Hardy. The humorous side of Mars exploration, Judith Pillinger. Mars in the RAS Archives, Peter Hingley.

SATURDAY 4 JULY:
SHA SUMMER PICNIC AT THE HANWELL COMMUNITY OBSERVATORY

This year’s SHA Summer Picnic will take place at the Hanwell Community Observatory, near Banbury, Oxon on Saturday 4 July. The start time is yet to be confirmed, but the grounds open at 12 noon and admission is free of charge.

The Observatory is sited in the grounds of Hanwell Castle, the remains of a fine early Tudor house just north-west of Banbury, 3 miles from junction 11 of the M40 and a similar distance from Banbury railway station. The extensive grounds, with their lake, medieval fishponds and leafy walks, provide many attractive spots for a picnic on a fine day and are of considerable interest in their own right.

The Observatory is the permanent home of the McIver Paton 12.5-inch reflector, the main mirror of which is a 1908 Calver, the 30-inch reflector due to be commissioned for public use this Summer, and the John Wall 30-inch dialyte, the largest refractor ever to have been mounted in the U.K., all of which will be on display on 4 July.

There is also likely to be a display of various astronomical items of antiquarian interest. On-site parking up to a maximum of 10 or 12 cars exists, so we ask members intending to drive to share vehicles as far as possible, with overspill parking just outside our gates in the village; a location map and further details will be put up on the HCO website - www.hanwellobservatory.org.uk - about one month before the event.

Christopher Taylor, Director, HCO
CALL FOR PAPERS: SHA AUTUMN CONFERENCE SATURDAY 31 OCT 2009 - THEME NOW OPEN

This year’s SHA Autumn Conference had the theme of ‘Astronomers Abroad’ but the theme has now been opened to include all other astro-historical topics. We are looking for five or six SHA members to speak either on the original topic, or on anything relevant to our subject. The meeting, which will be held in the Dickens Room at the Birmingham & Midland Institute in Birmingham, England (see: www.bmi.org.uk) will start with Reception at 9.30am and the first lecture will commence at 10.00am following an Introduction and Welcome by SHA Chairman Gilbert Satterthwaite. It is hoped to have a flexible morning session with perhaps two or three speakers giving 30-40 minute talks between 10am - 1pm. The afternoon session (from 2pm) will it is hoped comprise of two 1 hour lectures (all slot times include time for questions) followed by closing comments by the Chairman. The BMI closes at 5pm therefore the Conference will close no later than 4.30pm.

Any SHA member interested in presenting a paper should contact the Secretary, Kevin Kilburn, asap by email to: kkilburn@globalnet.co.uk.

SHA MEETINGS IN 2009

Advance notice:

Sat. 4 July SHA Summer Picnic at Hanwell Community Observatory, Oxfordshire. Details on page 3. See: www.hanwellobservatory.org.uk

Sat. 18 July SHA AGM and Summer Conference, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. A joint meeting with the Scientific Instrument Society (www.sis.org.uk). Details TBC. Contact Gilbert Satterthwaite: chair@shastro.org.uk

Sat. 31 October SHA Autumn Conference, Dickens Room, Birmingham & Midland Institute (www.bmi.org.uk). Theme: ‘Open’ - see call for papers (left). Contact Kevin Kilburn: kkilburn@globalnet.co.uk

Fuller details will be sent later.

COUNCIL MEETINGS 2009


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www.shastro.org.uk

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Calendar in Brief 2009

Thurs. 1 January
SHA Subscription Renewals due. Contact Peter Hingley pdh@ras.org.uk

Sat. 28 March
SHA Joint Meeting with RMetS, RAS, Burlington House, London.

Sat. 18 April
SHA David Dewhirst Meeting, IOA, Cambridge.

Mon. 20 - Thur. 23 April
European Week of Astronomy and Space Science, including RAS NAM etc: www.jenam2009.eu

Fri. 8 May
Mars Before the Space Age, RAS, Burlington House, London.

Sat. 4 July
SHA Summer Picnic, Hanwell Community Observatory, Oxfordshire.

Sat. 18 July
SHA AGM & Summer Conference, NMM, Greenwich.

Sat. 31 October
SHA Autumn Conference, BMI.

Regular Contributors

STUART WILLIAMS

e-News Editor
Stuart Williams is also Research Librarian at the SHA’s Sir Robert Ball Library in Birmingham.

KEVIN KILBURN

Kevin Kilburn is the Secretary of the SHA and contributes society news.

CLIVE DAVENHALL

Clive Davenhall is Editor of the SHA Bulletin and contributes timely news.