



# SHA e-News

*Society for the History of Astronomy*

Volume 7, no.4, October 2015.

Editor: David Sellers

## DON'T MISS OUT - BOOK NOW! SHA AUTUMN DELIGHTS

The Autumn 2015 Conference of the **Society for the History of Astronomy** is almost upon us (31 October) and looks set to provide an enthralling day out - every bit as good as members are now accustomed to expecting from SHA events.

The first hour of the afternoon session will form the Annual General Meeting of the Society. Here is a chance to have your say. Members will receive reports on SHA activities over the past year and will be able to elect the Officers and Council for 2016. We are confident that enough enthusiastic volunteers will be available to fill the posts, but new nominations will be very welcome. Full details are given overleaf.

## NEWTONIAN PICNIC

A thoroughly enjoyable day out was had by members at the SHA's Summer Picnic, which was held on Sat 4 July 2015 at Woolsthorpe Manor, the birthplace of Isaac Newton. Participants had a guided tour around the property and afterwards some visited the medieval church of St John the Baptist at Colsterworth, where Newton was baptised.



**SHA members enjoying a sunny day at Newton's birthplace** (photo: Mike Leggett)

## BOOK INVASION!

The SHA's Sir Robert Ball Library at the Birmingham and Midland Institute has been almost overwhelmed by donations. The Library, although quite sizeable, has nearly run out of shelf space.

At the beginning of the year it was the repository of about 1400 books and many hundreds of bound journals. Recently, however, the library has received 49 boxes of books and pamphlets from the personal library of our late-colleague Gilbert Satterthwaite, through the generosity of his family.



**Some members of the SHA Council inspecting the Library on 12 September (l.to r.: Bob Bower, Geoff King, Gerard Gilligan, Laura Carroll, Kevin Kilburn, and Mike Shaw - photo: David Sellers)**

Furthermore, unopened yet, but already in boxes in the Library are numerous books from the personal collection of our former President Madeline Cox.

The Library attempts to preserve lesser known books for the future - especially those which concern the local history of astronomy and are no longer in print. Librarian Stuart Williams intends to reissue a new catalogue after 'weeding' the current stock of duplicates for sale after absorbing the Satterthwaite and Cox collections

## FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

### 2015 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for this year will be held at the Birmingham & Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS, on **Sat. 31 October 2015**, 9.30 - 17.00.

Confirmed speakers include:

Allan Chapman on *Sir John Herschel: Astronomer by Inheritance*

Rebekah Higgitt on *Nevil Maskelyne and the role of Astronomer Royal*

Laura Carroll on *Derbyshire Astronomers* (Madeline Cox's last completed research paper)

Phil Barnard on *The Chance Brothers: their contribution to Astronomy*

Advance booking is strongly requested, as this helps in facilitating the arrangements. To pre-register (£5 for members; £10 for non-members), please contact Roger Hutchins ([roger.hutchins@btinternet.com](mailto:roger.hutchins@btinternet.com)).

### 2016 SPRING CONFERENCE

The 2016 SHA Spring Conference will be held on **Sat. 2 April 2016**, jointly with the William Herschel Society, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, 16 Queen Sq., BA1 2HN. Speakers include:

Roger Moses on *100 years of Cosmic Rays*

David Love on *Johannes Kepler*

Francis Ring on *Sir William Herschel and the Bath Philosophical Society*

John Chuter on *Somerset Astronomers*

Richard Mansfield on *Bristol Astronomical Society: past, present and future*

The Conference will include a reception at the Herschel Museum (and maybe a tour of the museum).

### 2016 SUMMER PICNIC

The 2016 summer picnic will be at [Hanwell Community Observatory](#), near Banbury in North Oxfordshire on **Sat 2 July 2016**. Members and guests all welcome.

### 2016 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for 2016 will be held at the Birmingham & Midlands

## SHA COUNCIL

The current SHA Officers & Council are:

### Honorary Council Members

**Hon President** Dr Allan Chapman

**Hon Vice-Pres.** Dr Michael Hoskin

**Hon Vice-Pres.** Prof. Sir Arnold Wolfendale, FRS

### Council Members

**Acting Chairman** Kevin Kilburn

**Vice-Chairman** Vacant

**General & Membership Secretary** Bob Bower

**Treasurer** Roger Hutchins

**Editor, SHA Bulletin** Clive Davenhall

**Editor, SHA e-News** David Sellers

**Publicity Officer** Mike Leggett

**Survey Co-ordinator** Kevin Johnson

**Co-opted member** Laura Carroll

**Co-opted member** Geoff King

**Co-opted member** Mike Shaw

**Co-opted member** John Chuter

**Co-opted member** Gerard Gilligan

### Co-opted Officers (non-Council)

**Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer** Ian Ridpath

**Archivist** Mark Hurn

**Online Editor/Librarian** Stuart Williams

### SHA COUNCIL MEETINGS

The next meeting of the SHA Council is scheduled as follows:

2015 Nov 21 Birmingham (BMI)

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

Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BS on **Sat. 29 October 2016**, 9.30 - 17.00.

## PRESENTATIONS & POSTERS?

If you would like to give presentations, or exhibit posters relating to your research, at future SHA events please contact the [General Secretary](#) in the first instance.

## SHA PUBLICATIONS

### SHA e-NEWS

The next issue of the *e-NEWS* is due in early January 2016. If you know of any meetings, publications, exhibitions or events pertaining to the history of astronomy that might interest other members, please email brief details to the [editor](#).



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

### SHA BULLETIN

Issue 24 of the *SHA Bulletin* should have been received by all members. It is hoped that future issues will now appear on a more regular basis - normally two per year. Issue no.25 should be published in February 2016. 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 and guidelines for contributions are available from the [Bulletin's web page](#).

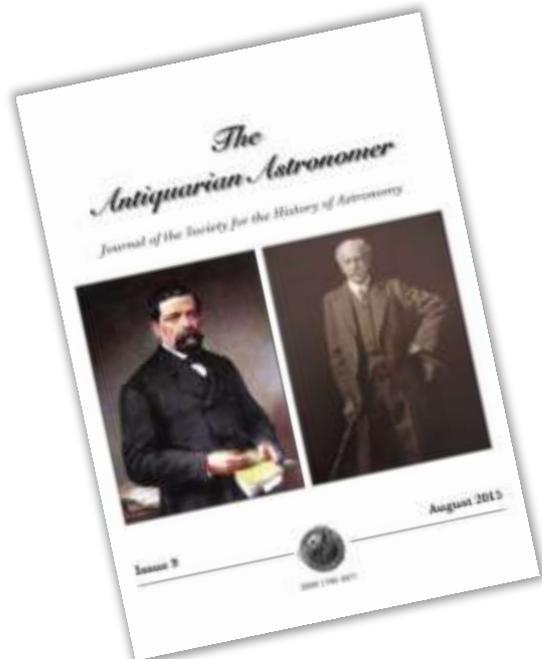
It is usually prudent to check with the Editor before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book reviews). Back Issues of the *Bulletin* (and its predecessor: *SHA Newsletter*) are now indexed on the Abstract service of SAO/ NASA. Enter "SHAN" as the 'Journal Code' at

[http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib\\_abs.html](http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html)

It is hoped that in the near future, scanned copies of the original articles will be accessible in the same way.

### THE ANTIQUARIAN ASTRONOMER

The *Antiquarian Astronomer* issue no.9 was published in early September and all members should now have received their copy. Please let us know, if you have not got yours.



This issue includes: *An astronomer's summer outing to the Lizard, Cornwall, 1769*, by Carolyn Kennett (about an expedition to measure the longitude of the Lizard Point, made by John Bradley, nephew of the Astronomer Royal James Bradley); *Mars: The history of a master illusionist*, by William Sheehan (a psychologically based history of Mars observation); *Edwin Alfred Holmes: His life and writings*, by Anthony Kinder (an account of the discoverer of the periodic Comet Holmes).

Note: the first six issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* have been online at NASA's ADS service since the start of the year. Type "antas" into the box at the top marked Journal Name/Code on this page

[http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib\\_abs.html](http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html)

Members and others wishing to submit material for future issues of the *Antiquarian Astronomer* should contact the Editor, Ian Ridpath at [ian@ianridpath.com](mailto:ian@ianridpath.com). [Guidance for authors](#) can be found on our website.

In future, as a result of a Council decision on 13 Sep 2014, any member having a paper published in *The Antiquarian Astronomer* will receive **free membership of the SHA for one year**. Non-members having a paper published will be offered a year's complimentary membership of the SHA.

## SHA PUBLICITY LEAFLETS

Two thousand copies of the new glossy SHA publicity leaflet have now been printed. If you would like copies for distribution at a forthcoming event in your area or for a relevant visitor centre, etc, that you know of, please do contact Mike Leggett, our Publicity Officer.

## RESEARCH & WRITING WORKSHOP FOR MEMBERS

As mentioned in the last SHA e-News, the Council is aware that a number of members are researching, but are less confident about writing up, and some have an astronomical interest that they would like to research, but are not sure how to start.

Simultaneously, the editors of *e-News*, *Bulletin* and *Antiquarian Astronomer* all need new material for the SHA publications.

Hence we have organised a one-day workshop in the new year, at the SHA's Library in the BMI, Birmingham on Saturday 30 January 2016. Participants will meet first at noon for lunch and a chat in the nearby 'All Bar One', then migrate to the Library. The workshop will be lead by Lee Macdonald (SHA Member, and Deputy Director of the BAA Historical Section), who completed his PhD thesis on Kew Observatory in September. He will be assisted by David Sellers. Places will probably be limited to about ten people.

The draft programme is yet to be finalised and will be tailored to the interests and concerns of participants. Provisional topics include: Finding your way in archives; How to identify a research topic; Beginning research; Writing; Publishing.

If you are interested in taking advantage of this new initiative, please email [roger.hutchins@btinternet.com](mailto:roger.hutchins@btinternet.com) stating one or two research or writing issues that would particularly interest you and confirming that you can attend on this date.

## LIBRARY



**Birmingham and Midland Institute, home of the SHA Library**

Librarian Stuart Williams intends to reissue a new catalogue after sorting through the large quantity of new acquisitions. The existing 74-page [catalogue](#) (Oct 2014)—completed by Madeline Cox—is available on the Society website.

The [Sir Robert Ball Library](#) of the SHA is located at the Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI), 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS—just 10 mins walk from New St and Snow Hill stations.

If you are a member of the SHA and you wish to consult or borrow any items, please arrange a visit in advance with the Librarian: [library@shastro.org.uk](mailto:library@shastro.org.uk). Due to logistical problems and concerns about the safety of books, the previous postal loan system has now been discontinued.

### Open Days

Our Librarian, Stuart Williams, hopes to open the library to visitors several times before the AGM and also on a monthly basis throughout 2016. These will mostly be on Friday afternoons, but up to four Fridays may be replaced with Saturdays.

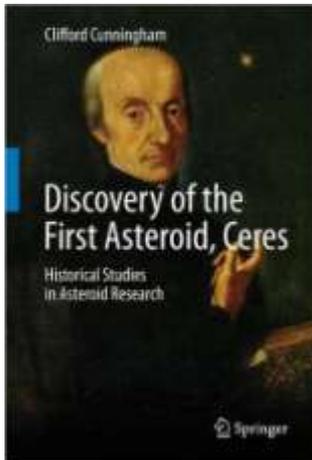
If you are coming to the AGM on 31 October, do make sure to visit your library during the day and see just how impressive it is.

## LEROY DOGGETT PRIZE

Professor Albert Van Helden has been awarded the [2016 LeRoy E. Doggett Prize](#) of the American Astronomical Society's Historical Astronomy Division (AAS-HAD) for his substantial contributions to the history of astronomy. Many congratulations to him!

## FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

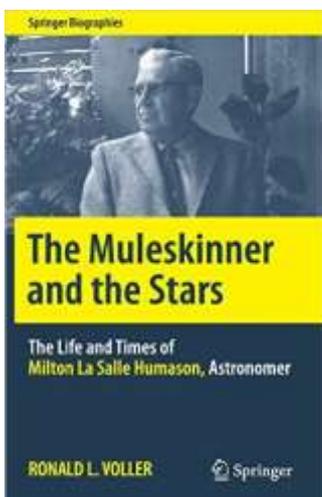
[Discovery of the First Asteroid, Ceres](#), by Clifford Cunningham (Springer), Nov. 2015, pp.435 (hardback, £117.00), ISBN 9783319217765



Based on extensive primary sources, many never previously translated into English, this is the account of the origins of Ceres as it went from being classified as a new planet to reclassification as the first of a previously unknown group of celestial objects.

This book includes all the voluminous correspondence, translated into English, between the astronomers of Europe about the startling discovery of Ceres by Piazzi in 1801. It covers the period up to March 1802, at which time Pallas was discovered. Also included are Piazzi's two monographs about Ceres, and the sections of two books dealing with Ceres, one by Johann Bode, the other by Johann Schroeter. The origin of the word 'asteroid' is explained, along with several chapters on the antecedents of the story going back to ancient Greek times. The formulation of Bode's Law is given, as are the details of the efforts of Baron von Zach to organize a search for the supposed missing planet between Mars and Jupiter. Examples of verse created to commemorate the great discovery are included in this volume.

[The Muleskinner and the Stars: The Life and Times of Milton La Salle Humason, Astronomer](#), Ronald L. Voller (Springer), Sep.2015, pp.244 (hardback, £62.99), ISBN 9781493928798



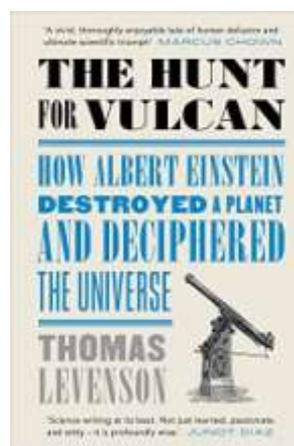
This is the story of the astronomer Milton La Salle Humason, whose career was integral to developing our understanding of stellar and universal evolution and who helped to build the analytical basis for the work of such notable astronomers and astrophysicists as Paul Merrill, Walter Adams, Alfred Joy, Frederick Seares, Fritz Zwicky,

Walter Baade and Edwin Hubble.

Humason's unlikely story began on the shores of the Mississippi River in Winona, Minnesota, in 1891 and led to the foot of Mount Wilson outside Los Angeles, California, twelve years later. It is there where he first attended summer camp in 1903 and was captivated by its surroundings. The mountain would become the backdrop for his life and career over the next six decades as he helped first build George Ellery Hale's observatory on the summit and then rose to become one of that institution's leading figures through the first half of the twentieth century.

The story chronicles Humason's life on Mount Wilson, from his first trip to the mountain to his days as a muleskinner, leading teams of mules hauling supplies to the summit during the construction of the observatory, and follows him through his extraordinary career in spectroscopy, working beside Edwin Hubble as the two helped to reconstruct our concept of the universe. A patient, knowledgeable and persistent observer, Humason was later awarded an honorary doctorate for his work, despite having no formal education beyond the eighth grade. His skill at the telescope is legendary. During his career he photographed the spectra of stars, galaxies and other objects many thousands of times fainter than can be seen with the naked eye and pushed the boundary of the known universe deeper into space than any before him. His work, which included assisting in the formulation of Hubble's Law of redshifts, helped to set the field of cosmology solidly on its foundation

[The Hunt for Vulcan: How Albert Einstein destroyed a Planet and Deciphered the Universe](#), by Thomas Levenson (Random House), Nov.2015, pp.254 (hardback, £17.17), ISBN 9781784973971

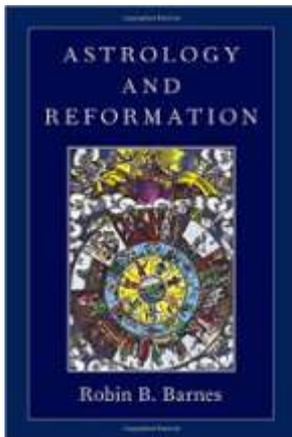


In 1859, the brilliant scientist Urbain LeVerrier discovered that the planet Mercury has a wobble, that its orbit shifts over time. His explanation was that there had to be an unseen planet circling even closer to the sun. He called the planet Vulcan. Supported by the theories of Sir Isaac Newton, the finest astronomers of their generation began to seek out

Vulcan and at least a dozen reports of discovery were filed. There was only one problem. Vulcan does not exist – and was never there. The real explanation was only revealed when a young Albert Einstein came up with a theory of gravity that also happened to prove that

Mercury's orbit could indeed be explained - not by Newton's theories but by Einstein's own theory of general relativity. The Hunt for Vulcan is a scientific detective tale at the intersection of theory, measurement, and belief; and a reflection on a bizarre period in which the power of conformity led very smart people to literally see a planet that wasn't there. The author, Thomas Levenson is a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the author of the bestselling *Newton and the Counterfeiter* (2009).

**[Astrology and Reformation](#)**, by Robin B. Barnes (Oxford University Press), Dec.2015, pp.408 (hardback, £47.99), ISBN 9780199736058

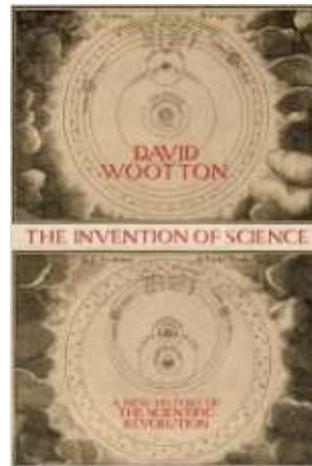


During the sixteenth century, no part of the Christian West saw the development of a more powerful and pervasive astrological culture than the very home of the Reformation movement—the Protestant towns of the Holy Roman Empire. While most modern approaches to the religious and social reforms of that age give

scant attention to cosmological preoccupations, this study argues that astrological concepts and imagery played a key role in preparing the ground for the evangelical movement sparked by Martin Luther in the 1520s, as well as in shaping the distinctive characteristics of German evangelical culture over the following century.

Spreading above all through cheap printed almanacs and prognostications, popular astrology functioned in paradoxical ways. It contributed to an enlarged and abstracted sense of the divine that led away from clericalism, sacramentalism, and the cult of the saints; at the same time, it sought to ground people more squarely in practical matters of daily life. The art gained unprecedented sanction from Luther's closest associate, Philipp Melancthon, whose teachings influenced generations of preachers, physicians, schoolmasters, and literate layfolk. But the apocalyptic astrology that came to prevail among evangelicals involved a perpetuation, even a strengthening, of ties between faith and cosmology, which played out in beliefs about nature and natural signs that would later appear as rank superstitions. Astrology and Reformation illuminates an early modern outlook that was both practical and prophetic; a world that was neither traditionally enchanted nor rationally disenchanted, but quite different from the medieval world of perception it had displaced.

**[The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution](#)**, by David Wootton (Allen Lane), Sep.2015, pp.784 (hardback, £30.00), ISBN 9781846142109

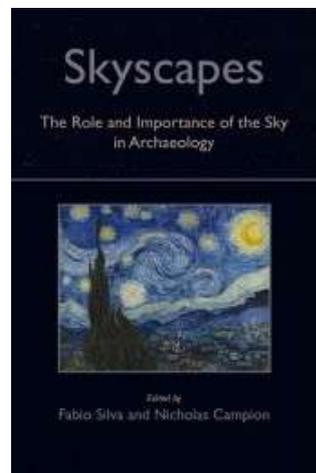


We live in a world made by science. How and when did this happen? This book tells the story of the extraordinary intellectual and cultural revolution that gave birth to modern science, and mounts a major challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy of its history.

The new science did not consist simply of new discoveries, or new methods. It relied on a new understanding of what knowledge might be, and with this came a new language: discovery, progress, facts, experiments, hypotheses, theories, laws of nature - almost all these terms existed before 1492, but their meanings were radically transformed so they became tools with which to think scientifically. We all now speak this language of science, which was invented during the Scientific Revolution.

The new culture had its martyrs (Bruno, Galileo), its heroes (Kepler, Boyle), its propagandists (Voltaire, Diderot), and its patient labourers (Gilbert, Hooke). It led to a new rationalism, killing off alchemy, astrology, and belief in witchcraft. David Wootton's book aims to change our understanding of how this great transformation came about, and of what science is.

**[Skyscapes: the role and importance of the sky in archaeology](#)**, by Nicholas Campion and Fabio Silva (eds.) (Oxbow Books), 2015, pp.210 (paperback, £38.00), ISBN 9781782978404



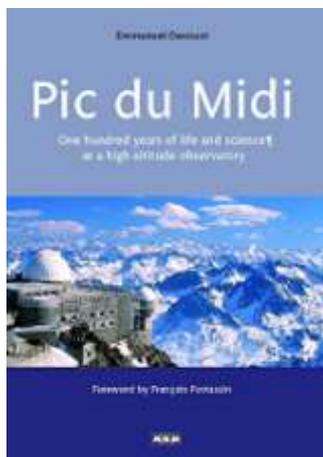
Eleven papers extend discussion of the role and importance of the landscape and the wider environment to past societies, and to the understanding and interpretation of their material remains, into consideration of the significance of the celestial environment: the skyscape. The role of the sky for past societies has been relegated to the

fringes of archaeological discourse. Nevertheless

archaeoastronomy has developed a new rigour in the last few decades and the evidence suggests that it can provide insights into the beliefs, practices and cosmologies of past societies. *Skyscapes* explores the current role of archaeoastronomical knowledge in archaeological discourse and how to integrate the two. It shows how it is not only possible but even desirable to look at the skyscape to shed further light on human societies. This is achieved by first exploring the historical relationship between archaeoastronomy and academia in general, and with archaeology in particular. The volume continues by presenting case-studies that either demonstrate how archaeoastronomical methodologies can add to our current understanding of past societies, their structures and beliefs, or how integrated approaches can raise new questions and even revolutionise current views of the past.

## RECENT BOOKS MISSED

[Pic du Midi : One hundred years of life and science at a high altitude observatory](#), by Emmanuel Davoust (MSM), Aug.2014, pp.478 (paperback, 29.95 euro), ISBN 9782350801438



On hearing the name of this isolated peak in the Pyrenees range, the general public thinks of the astronomical Observatory. They do not realize that, in the past, the Observatory was a centre for research in climatology, atmospheric physics, cosmic rays and botany. However, what distinguishes this establishment from other

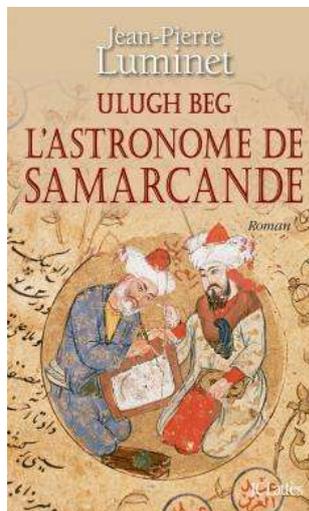
observatories, and what makes its history so interesting, is its location at an altitude of nearly three thousand metres.

The ascension was long and dangerous, and, at the summit, daily life was a struggle against cold and isolation. How could anyone accept to live there throughout the entire year?

This is the question this book attempts to answer. To reconstruct this history, that of a scientific establishment of course, but above all the history of a human adventure. The author often shared life at the summit in the cold and the snow, the sleepless nights, the descents in the snow when the cable car broke down. He thus had a privileged insider's view of this

surprising and stirring history. This is the translation of the second, revised, updated and expanded, French edition of this work.

[L'astronome de Samarcande](#), novel (in French) by Jean-Pierre Luminet (JC Lattés), Apr.2015, pp.280 (paperback, 19.00 euros), ISBN 9782709644839



The life and work of one of the greatest astronomers of the Arab world, grandson of Tamerlane.

In 1429, Samarkand is in effervescence. The largest astronomical observatory ever built has just been inaugurated. It is comprised of a massive sextant 80 meters tall, with a radius of 40 meters, rising out of the depths of the Earth, and a gigantic sundial whose outside

walls are decorated with a vast fresco representing the zodiac. Inside are the most up-to-date measurement tools of time and space.

The promoter and director of the observatory, is none other than the prince and governor of Samarkand, Ulugh Beg, grandson of the conqueror of the Orient, Indus and Jourdan: the notorious Tamerlane. Passionate about science and mapping the skies, but a weak politician and warrior, Ulugh Beg, with the help of the best astronomers of the time, will calculate the position of thousands of stars resulting in a major catalogue that will fascinate wise men, holy men and travelers from all over the world.

**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.*

## PATRICK MOORE PRIZE

The BAA has [invited nominations for its annual Sir Patrick Moore Prize](#) of £250, which is awarded to a member or members or to an affiliated society or school for an area of activity, reflecting Sir Patrick's life and enthusiasms - including the history of astronomy. Nominees may be nominated by themselves or by another. Nominations, including a short statement explaining the reason the person should be considered for the awarding of the Prize, to Madelaine Davey at the Office (email [office@britastro.org](mailto:office@britastro.org)) by 20 Oct.

## SHA RESEARCH GRANTS

SHA Small Research Grants are available for the period **1 September 2015 to 31 December 2016** and applications are solicited. These grants are made available to provide limited financial support for members' research.

For 2015/16 a total sum of £1000 has been set aside to provide research grants and members may submit applications for up to this amount. Grants may be used to support research in any aspect of the history of astronomy, broadly understood, and may be used to fund any expenses incurred while pursuing such a research project. The grants are available only to SHA members in good standing.

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.

## WEB-LINKS NOTICED

### A Residence Above the Clouds

In 1856 the astronomer Charles Piazzi Smyth and his wife, Jessie Duncan, departed from the Scottish city of Edinburgh to the peaks of Tenerife to demonstrate the benefits of observing the sky at the top of the mountains.



Loaded with equipment and telescopes, they launched an unprecedented adventure that would forever change the way we look at the stars ....

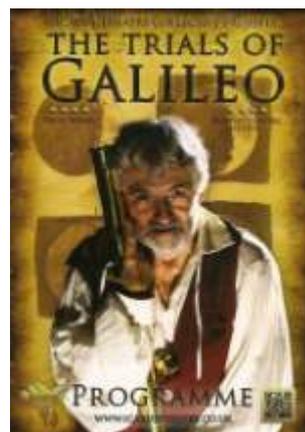
Now, documentary film maker, Guillermo Carnero-Rosell, is proposing to make a documentary film about the life of Charles Piazzi-Smyth (1819-1900), the last Astronomer Royal to run the Calton Hill observatory in Edinburgh. Piazzi-Smyth is famed for promoting the idea of mountain top astronomy.

A lovely trailer for the film can be watched (or downloaded) online at: <https://vimeo.com/131831001>

Let's hope that the film can be made a reality in time for the 2019 bi-centenary of Piazzi-Smyth's birth.

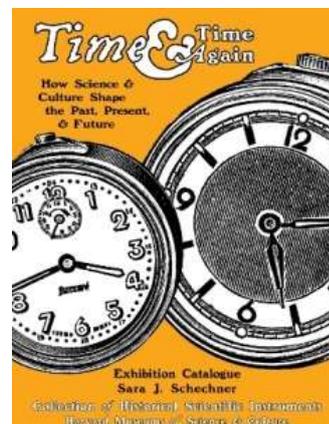
### Trials of Galileo

The excellent theatrical production *Trials of Galileo*, noted in our April issue, continues its 2015-17 international tour with performances in Oxford (7-9 Jan), Minehead (15 Jan), Bracknell (19 Jan), Enfield, Cambridge, Stirling, and many other places in the UK. The one-man play stars Tim Hardy and is produced by the Icarus Theatre Collective. [Full details of the 2016 tour schedule](#) can be consulted on their website.



### Time and Time Again

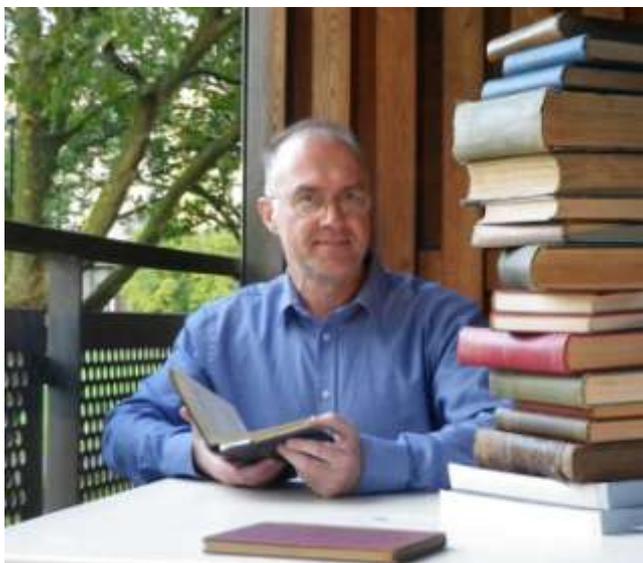
[Time and Time Again: How Science & Culture shape the past, present and future](#) (published 2014) is a magnificent 296 page free catalogue for an exhibition of the same name that was mounted by the Harvard University [Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments](#). The same institution has also recently made available a web-tool called [Waywiser](#) for searching through (or browsing) their collection, which includes a great deal that relates to the history of astronomy.



## MEET OUR MEMBERS

### SHA members introduce themselves and their interests

In this issue: *Bryn Jones (East London)*



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

Back in 2002 I saw a report in *Astronomy and Geophysics*, the magazine of the Royal Astronomical Society, about plans to establish the society. The organisation looked very worth supporting and I joined.

The society provides excellent ways for people with an interest in the history of astronomy to communicate with each other, particularly through its publications and meetings. The research published in the *Antiquarian Astronomer* is particularly valuable.

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

My primary interests are in British astronomical research in the 19th–20th centuries, and the history of astronomy in Wales. Most of my own research so far has been into Welsh astronomy.

#### What got you hooked on that?

I came across a Welsh-language popular introduction to astronomy in a second-hand bookshop in Caernarfon as a student many years ago. It surprised me to find that writing about astronomy in Welsh existed. The book, by an Anglican vicar called Silas Evans, included a chapter on the history of astronomy in Wales and a survey of amateur astronomy there at the time of its publication in 1923. This revealed a subject I had not known about before.

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

There have been a few highlights. It was intriguing to find some references to astronomical phenomena in ancient annals from Wales. One interesting thing I found was that the galaxy M64 had been observed for the first time ever in 1779 by Edward Pigott in the Vale of Glamorgan, but nobody had previously realised it.

However, one thing that particularly appealed was finding the diversity of the amateur astronomy community in the past. It included the wealthy and the poor, establishment figures and the marginalised, English and Welsh speakers, clergyman of the (then) established church and nonconformist ministers. However, far more men are prominent in the historical record than women, which is a pity, and further research is needed to try to lessen this imbalance.

#### Do you actively research, or prefer being an armchair scholar?

Active research appeals most to me because it is interesting to uncover something that has been overlooked previously. A lot of original research can still be done from an armchair these days, however!

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

Perhaps those of us who have been lucky enough to acquire rare or unusual books should prioritise those for preservation. Therefore it might be my duty to grab the copy of Robert Roberts's *Daearyddiaeth* ("Geography") of 1816 that I came across at a second-hand book stall several years ago. The book consists of two sections – the shorter one (still 96 pages long) is about astronomy. It shows how one publisher and educator saw the subject two hundred years ago, and includes his own unusual mathematical methods for estimating the times of eclipses and tides.

This does raise an interesting issue – what should those of us who own rare books do to ensure their very-long-term preservation. We could leave instructions in our wills for them to be donated to institutional libraries that do not already possess copies. Priority might be donation to the RAS and SHA libraries (and national libraries such as the British Library for any very rare items if those libraries do not possess copies). There is also the parallel issue of ensuring copies of written records go to archives.

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

We could all perhaps do a little more to record twentieth-century research, especially in British

universities, beyond the few famous figures who have so far received attention. I found the personal reminiscences of George Wilkins in the *Antiquarian Astronomer* particularly valuable: his articles should act as primary reference material for future historians of science.

Perhaps we could record the experiences of astronomers still alive who contributed to post-war research in universities, and encourage some to write their own reminiscences.

There are a few other things the SHA might do differently. One issue is that more of the talks given at SHA meetings could be written up for publication in the *Antiquarian Astronomer*. The society could also be a bit more proactive in approaching members for help or support – I'm sure there are members who would be happy to contribute if asked. We do need to attract new members, including younger ones, although I am very aware of the excellent publicity efforts of several members led by Mike Leggett in this respect.

## SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

As reported in the previous issue, Kevin Johnson, our new Survey Co-ordinator, has been busy getting to grips with the nuts & bolts of the Survey website and is hoping to make it more resilient and easier to search. There is now an astonishing wealth of information on the website and one of Kevin's chief priorities was to ensure that safe backups are made. This has now been done and the result is 518 Mb of offline stored data - an entire CD's worth!

Carolyn Kennett has kindly taken on the role of Survey co-ordinator for Cornwall and Dorset, and new member, James Dawson, has done the same for Nottinghamshire. The Survey aims to reveal the depth of local history of astronomy across the UK and is available both [online](#) and at the SHA's library in Birmingham.

## SHA PUBLICITY STALLS

Forthcoming events at which we hope to have SHA stalls are:

**Starfest** on 17 Oct 2015 in Essex (we would be especially grateful if members living nearby would help with this);

**The FAS Convention** on 24 Oct 2015 at the University of Birmingham;

**The Leeds Astromeeet** on 7th November at the University of Leeds;

**The Institute of Astronomy Open Afternoon** on 19 Mar 2016 in Cambridge;

**The South-West Astrofair** on 13 Aug 2016 at the Norman Lockyer Observatory, Sidmouth, Devon).

If you will be at any of these events or live in the area and could spare an hour or two to help on a stall, it would be much appreciated. For further information or offers of help, contact the Publicity Officer, Mike Leggett ([leggett189@btinternet.com](mailto:leggett189@btinternet.com)).

A new tri-part full-colour SHA publicity leaflet is currently being distributed to relevant visitor centres, libraries, night classes, etc. If you know of a worthwhile place to have the leaflet available, please let Mike Leggett know.

At its September meeting, the SHA Council agreed to have a new banner made for use on our stalls.



SHA publicity stall on 21 Mar 2015  
(photo: Mark Hurn)

## MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Bob Bower (SHA General Secretary) has emailed members (9 Sep) to let everyone know that our list of members' interests is about to be updated. This list is not for general distribution, but could serve as a means of putting members in touch with other members sharing the same research interest, on request.

If you are willing to be put in touch with other members, on request, in this way, please send Bob a brief list of your interest areas ([membership@shastro.org.uk](mailto:membership@shastro.org.uk)).

## HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY PART-TIME COURSES

It is good to see that a number of courses specialising in the history of astronomy are available in the coming academic year. These include:

### LEOMINSTER, HEREFORDSHIRE

“**Babylonian Stargazers to the Space Age – A Brief History of Astronomy**” lead by Paul Oliver for seven Tuesdays from 20 October 2015. Venue: Leominster Community Centre, School Road, Leominster, HR6 8NJ from 10.30am-12.30pm at a cost of £49.

Please contact Ann Wrightson on 01568 620486 or Kathy Brown at [kbrown@wea.org.uk](mailto:kbrown@wea.org.uk) to book or enrol at the first session of any of the courses.

### COWBRIDGE, VALE OF GLAMORGAN

“**History of Astronomy**” lead by Allan Trow (Dark Sky Wales) for six Wednesdays from 23 September 2015. 7.00 p.m.-9.00 p.m. (cost, Band A £57, Band B £44.50). Venue: Cowbridge Community College, Old Hall, High Street, Cowbridge, CF71 7AH (tel: 01446 773831).

If you know of any other such courses, please send details to SHA e-News, so that we can publicise them.

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

### Fred Hoyle Birth Centennial

Friday 9 Oct 2015, at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, London, W1J 0BQ.

An [RAS Specialist Discussion Meeting](#) organised by Simon Mitton, Professor John Barrow, Professor Andrew Fabian FRS

The birth centenary of Fred Hoyle was on 24 June 2015. This specialist discussion on the history of astronomy will examine Fred's impact on all aspects of astrophysics and cosmology. Hoyle is noted primarily for the theory of stellar nucleosynthesis and his controversial stances on other cosmological and scientific matters - in particular his rejection of the "Big Bang" theory. The emphasis will be a retrospective of Hoyle's professional career in advancing astronomy, and his lasting contributions to astronomy. Hoyle's many honours include the RAS Gold Medal (1968), the Bruce Medal (1970), the Royal Medal (1974) and the

Crafoord Prize (1997). He served as President of the Society 1971-73.

## BAA Historical Section Conference May 2016

Saturday 21 May 2016, at the Quaker meeting house, School St, Liverpool L1 3BT.

From 10:00 - 17:00, doors open 09:30 (TBC)

The theme of the conference (if any) will be announced in due course.

For 2017 the Historical Section is hoping to meet at the Royal Observatory Edinburgh, Blackford Hill, Edinburgh.

For further information, keep an eye on the [Section's website](#)

## From Sea to Sky: the Evolution of Air Navigation from the Ocean and Beyond

Thu 9 - Fri 10 Jun 2016, at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Following a series of successful conferences, Royal Museums Greenwich and the Royal Institute of Navigation are planning another event to bring together current research in the history of navigation.

Coinciding with *Above and Beyond*, an interactive exhibition on air and space technologies to be held at the National Maritime Museum (opening 27 May 2016), [this conference](#) will explore the evolution of aeronautical navigation and its relationships to practices at sea.

## SPACEFLIGHT HISTORY

A special edition of *Astronomy Now* might interest some members - *Saturn: exploring the ringed planet*: An A4 x 194 page publication, lavishly illustrated and with a good text. It covers the history of the mission, and then from arrival at Saturn in early 2004 to 2014. The mission will end in 2017, but meanwhile this is a lavish feast of a book for only £9.99. (Roger Hutchins)

### e-News CONTACT DETAILS

Communications relating to SHA e-News should be sent to the **Editor**: [enews@shastro.org.uk](mailto:enews@shastro.org.uk)

General communications to the Society should be sent to the **General Secretary** (Bob Bower): [membership@shastro.org.uk](mailto:membership@shastro.org.uk)

## SUMMARY DATES FOR THE DIARY

### 2015 MEETINGS

**9 Oct** *Fred Hoyle Birth Centennial*, specialist discussion at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, London. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**9–12 Oct.** *24th Annual Convention of the Antique Telescope Society* will be hosted at Lick Observatory, Mt. Hamilton, CA (USA).

**Sat 31 Oct.** *SHA Autumn Conference and AGM*, at the BMI in central Birmingham. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**20–22 Nov.** *Science, Technologies and Material Culture in the History of Education conference*, Liverpool Hope University.

### 2016 MEETINGS

**2 Apr** *SHA-Herschel Society Spring Conference* at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**21 May** *BAA Historical Section* meeting at the Quaker meeting house, School St, Liverpool L1 3BT. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**9- 10 Jun** *From Sea to Sky: the Evolution of Air Navigation from the Ocean and Beyond* at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**2 Jul** *SHA Summer Picnic* at Hanwell Community Observatory, near Banbury in North Oxfordshire. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

**29 Oct** *SHA Autumn Conference & AGM*, at the BMI in central Birmingham. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

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