



SHA e-News

Society for the History of Astronomy

Volume 8, no.3, July 2016.

Editor: David Sellers

FIFTEENTH AUTUMN CONFERENCE

SHA members meet on 29 October at the Birmingham and Midland Institute for the fifteenth annual general meeting and Autumn Conference. For one and a half decades the SHA has been hosting some of the most inspiring astronomical history conferences in the UK. This year's conference is set to maintain the high standard set by its predecessors.

Royal Greenwich Observatory under George Airy. Mike Leggett will outline the story of 'the Hartwell Synod' of observatories centred on Dr John Lee's Hartwell house.

CAN YOU HELP IDENTIFY THIS GENTLEMAN?



Autumn Conference Poster

Members will be treated to a talk by Allan Chapman on the remarkable nineteenth century writer, Mary Somerville, justly famed for her translation of Laplace's *Mechanism of the Heavens*. Bill Barton will speak about the history of the Chaldean Astronomical Society of Ipswich, on the centenary of its founding. Lee Macdonald will give a presentation on the work of the Magnetic and Meteorological Department of the



Our Librarian, James Dawson, writes: For the last eight months or so this gentleman has been watching us in the SHA's Library from the comfort of a frame, but Carolyn and I have no idea who he is. There are no clues on the back of the photograph or on the frame itself, but maybe you know who he is. We would love to find out. If you know who he is, or have any suggestions do let us know: library@shastro.org.uk.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to SHA member Prof. Bill Leatherbarrow, past-President of the BAA (see p.10).

The IAU and MPC have approved the minor planet name 95852 *Leatherbarrow* in his honour.

FUTURE SHA MEETINGS

2016 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The Annual General Meeting & Autumn Conference for 2016 will be held at the Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BS on **Sat. 29 October 2016**, 9.30 - 17.00. Speakers include:

Allan Chapman (*Mary Somerville and the British Grand Amateur Tradition*)

Bill Barton on *The Chaldean Astronomical Society*

Lee Macdonald on *George Airy and the Origins of the Magnetic and Meteorological Department at Greenwich*

Mike Leggett on *The Hartwell Synod: Dr John Lee, Admiral Smyth and their associates*

Booking in Advance at £5 per person for SHA members. £10 per person for non-members.

For more details and pre-registration, please contact

Gerard Gilligan – ggastro@liverpool.ac.uk

2017 SPRING CONFERENCE

The Spring Conference for 2017 will be taking place at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge on Sat. 22 April, close to the bicentenary of the death of the French astronomer, Charles Messier (26 June 1730-12 April 1817). It is hoped that some of the content will reflect his life and work.

2017 SUMMER PICNIC

Recent successful SHA Summer Picnics have been at Greenwich, Woolsthorpe Manor, and Hanwell Community Observatory. Can you suggest a suitable venue for the one in 2017? If so, please let the General Secretary have your ideas.

2017 AGM / AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The AGM/Conference for 2017 will be on Sat. 28 October 2017 at the Birmingham & Midland Institute.

PRESENTATIONS & POSTERS?

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

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

Chairman Bob Bower

Vice-Chairman (& e-News Editor) David Sellers

General Secretary Laura Carroll

Treasurer Geoff King

Membership Secretary Gerard Gilligan

Editors, SHA Bulletin Carolyn Kennett/ Len Adam

Publicity Officer Mike Leggett

Survey Coordinator Kevin Johnson

Online Editor John Chuter

Librarian James Dawson

Co-opted Officers (non-Council)

Editor, The Antiquarian Astronomer Ian Ridpath

Archivist Mark Hurn

Assistant Librarian Carolyn Bedwell

Historical Records Officer Anthony Kinder

SHA COUNCIL MEETINGS

The following SHA Council are scheduled for 2016:

September 03 Birmingham (BMI)

November 19 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.

EVENTS OFFICER NEEDED

Have you got a flair for handling organisational detail? The SHA Council would like to co-opt a member who would take the lead role in ensuring that our three annual events (Spring Conference, Summer Picnic, and AGM/Autumn Conference) all go off smoothly. You wouldn't be on your own: other Council members would lend an experienced hand, but we need someone who can coordinate activities, speaker booking, etc. Please contact the General Secretary, if you'd like to try your hand.

SHA PUBLICATIONS

SHA e-News

The next issue of the *e-News* is due in early October 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](#).

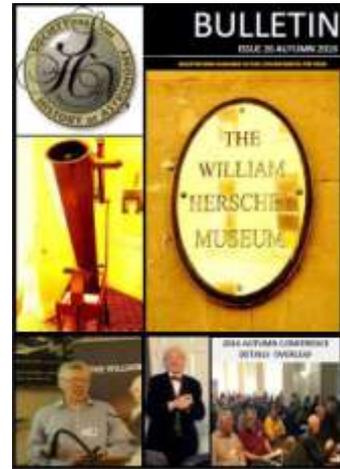
SHA BULLETIN

Printing of the unfortunately delayed issue 25 (Spring 2016) of the *SHA Bulletin* is expected during the last week of June and it should be distributed directly to members any day now.



Starting from issue 26, the *Bulletin* will undergo a distinct change of style and will be issued twice per year, to a strict timetable. It will be published on glossy paper (similar to the BAA's *Journal*) and members will also be able to download it as a PDF file.

Issue 26 (Autumn 2016) will be published on 1 October 2016 and issue 27 on 1 April 2017.



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 web page](#).

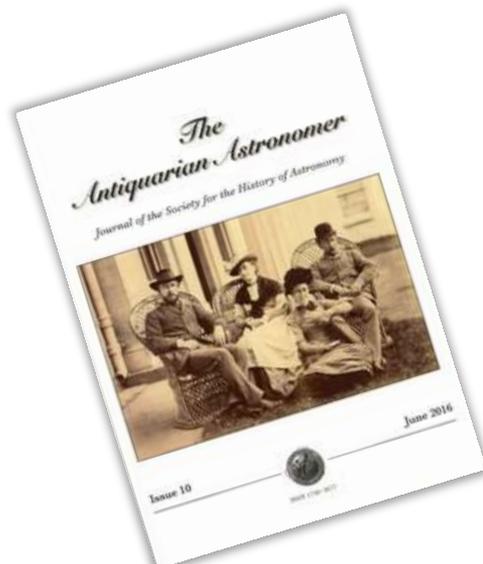
It is usually prudent to check with the Editors before preparing items where duplication is a possibility (e.g. book reviews). Back Issues of the *Bulletin* (and its predecessor: *SHA Newsletter*) are now indexed on the Abstract service of SAO/ NASA. Enter "SHAN" as the 'Journal Code' at

http://adsabs.harvard.edu/bib_abs.html

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 10 was posted to members in early June 2016. The next issue is due in the Summer of 2017.



Issue 10 contains the following papers:

A special centennial: Mercury, Vulcan, and an early triumph for General Relativity (William Sheehan and Tony Misch);

Entente céleste: David Gill, Ernest Mouchez, and the Cape and Paris Observatories 1878-92 (Paul A. Haley);

William Gascoigne, Richard Towneley, and the micrometer (Joe LaCour and David Sellers); and,

Sketching the Moon: crater drawings by Samuel Wilfrid Russell (1895-1965) (Louise E. Devoy and Agathe Daronnat).

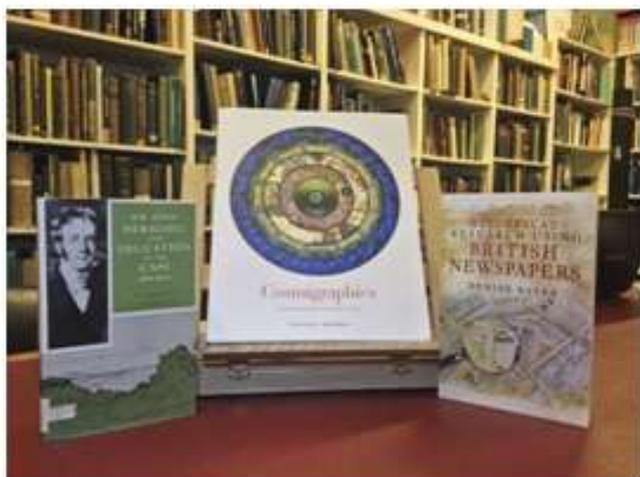
Note: the first six issues of *The Antiquarian Astronomer* have been online at NASA's ADS service since the start of 2015. Type "antas" into the box at the top marked Journal Name/Code on this page

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. [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 LIBRARY NEWS



The SHA Library at the BMI

Recent purchases by the Library include:

Bates, Denise. *Historical Research Using British Newspapers* (2016)

Benson, Michael. *Cosmographics: Picturing Space Through Time* (2014)

Ferguson, William Thomson. *Sir John Herschel and education at the Cape, 1834-1840* (1961)

Some recent donations [donor in square brackets] are:

Higgitt, Rebekah. *Maskelyne: Astronomer Royal* (2014) [Bob Bower]

Love, David. *Kepler and the Universe: How One Man Revolutionized Astronomy* (2015) [George Beckmann]

Newcomb, Simon. *The Reminiscences of an Astronomer* (1903) [James Dawson]

A list of forthcoming dates the library will be open:

- Mon 11 Jul
- Thu 15 Sep
- Thu 21 Jul
- Fri 30 Sep
- Tue 9 Aug
- Mon 17 Oct
- Mon 22 Aug
- Thu 27 Oct

The library is scheduled to be open between 10am and 3pm on these dates, but invariably it is open between 9am and 6pm but please do [contact](#) the library in advance of a visit.

An updated version of the catalogue is due to be released to members in the next few weeks. It will be available on the [library page](#) of the Society website and the link will be emailed to all members.

If you want to know more about the library or its stock, or if 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: library@shastro.org.uk

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.

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.

BMI HERITAGE OPEN DAY 10 September 2016

The *Birmingham & Midland Institute* - home of the SHA Library - has been at the heart of Birmingham's cultural life for over 150 years, originally founded by Act of Parliament in 1854 for the 'Diffusion and

Advancement of Science, Literature and Art amongst all Classes of Persons resident in Birmingham and Midland Counties'. Charles Dickens was one of its early Presidents.

Come and learn about the illustrious history of the Institute with Dr Connie Wan, the BMI's Programme Development Manager. The talk is followed by an exclusive guided tour of the Grade II* listed building which also houses the original Birmingham Library that was established in 1779.

The building is open all day giving you the opportunity to explore our library and meet members of the BMI's affiliated societies including the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, and the Society for the History of Astronomy.

The building will be open between 10am - 4pm. The SHA will hopefully have a stand, maybe a book sale, and the library will be open for tours. If any SHA members want to come and help that would be great.

CHARITY STATUS LATEST

The June Council meeting of the Society received an in-depth report from our Treasurer, Geoff King, on the pros and cons of seeking 'Charity' status.

Essentially, three types of 'Charity' are relevant: a *Charitable Incorporated Organisation* (registered with the Charity Commission and HMRC); an *Unincorporated Charity* (also registered with both the Charity Commission and HMRC); or, a *Small Charity* (registered with the HMRC but with an annual income of less than £5,000).

Given that our income will normally be less than £5000 p.a., the Council decided to recommend to the AGM that we seek the *Small Charity* status in 2 years time. This will need some minor amendments to our Constitution, which will also be placed before an AGM at the appropriate time.

MEMBER SURVEY

Around the time that this issue of SHA e-News is circulated, members should receive an email request to take part in a brief online opinion survey. We hope that you will take this opportunity to give the Council some feedback with your views on the SHA's activities, publications and meetings. We also hope that you will let us have your ideas on other things that the SHA could be doing to serve existing members and attract new ones.

WIDENING THE COUNCIL

At the moment, the SHA's Constitution limits the Council membership to: Chair, Vice-Chair, General Secretary, Membership Secretary and not more than 7 other councillors. In order to facilitate the full involvement of all members who are carrying out specific jobs for the Society, the Council has agreed to place an amendment at the AGM allowing as many Councillors to be appointed 'as are deemed necessary'. If you have any comments on this, please pass them to the SHA Chairman.

SHA MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

In June 2016 our Membership Secretary, Mike Shaw, stepped down from the post, because of an unexpected increase of responsibilities in his 'day job' and consequent pressures on his available spare time. The SHA Council is very grateful for all the work that Mike has put into the membership role since he took it on. A new Membership Secretary will be chosen at the AGM in October, but in the meantime Gerard Gilligan has volunteered to take on the role with immediate effect and Mike has kindly offered to help with the transition.

NEW HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY AWARD BY R.A.S.

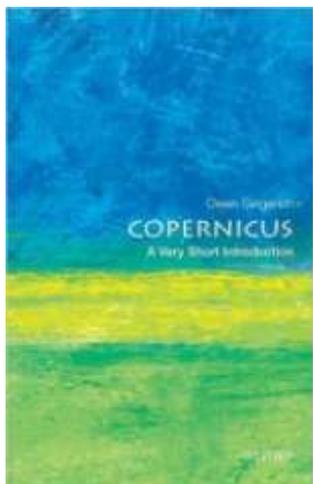


The Royal Astronomical Society is seeking nominations for its new [History of Astronomy or Geophysics Medal](#). This is to be awarded to an individual who has achieved outstanding personal research into the history of astronomy or geophysics. Proposed in 2015, as a dedicated medal for historical research, rather than awarding the Jackson-Gwilt Medal (last awarded to SHA Hon. President, Allan Chapman) every five years. The first medal is to be awarded in 2017, then in 2020 to coincide with the bicentenary of the RAS. The full name of the medal will be announced later in 2016.

Nominations should be submitted by 31 July to awards@ras.org.uk for the following year's awards.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS NOTICED

[Copernicus: A Very Short Introduction](#), Owen Gingerich (OUP), Aug 2016, pp.120 (paperback, £7.99), ISBN 9780199330966

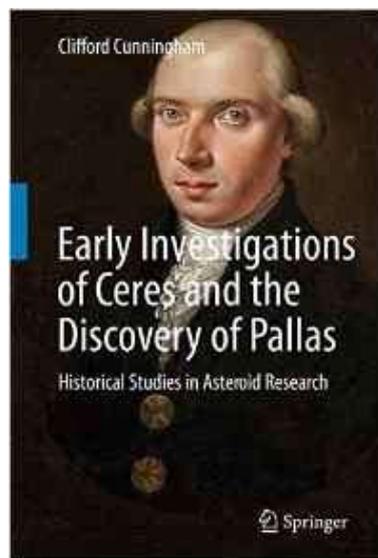


In this book, leading historian of science Owen Gingerich sets Copernicus in the context of a rapidly changing world, where the recent invention of printing with moveable type not only made sources more readily available to him, but also fueled Martin's Luther's transformation of the religious landscape.

Gingerich reveals Copernicus' heliocentric revolution as an aesthetic achievement not dictated by observational 'proofs', but another new way of looking at the ancient cosmos.

Out of Gingerich's engaging biography emerges the image of a scientist, intellectual, patriot, and reformer, who lived in an era when political as well as religious beliefs were shifting.

[Early Investigations of Ceres and the Discovery of Pallas](#), by Clifford Cunningham (Springer), June 2016, pp.405 (hardback, £112.00), ISBN 9783319288130



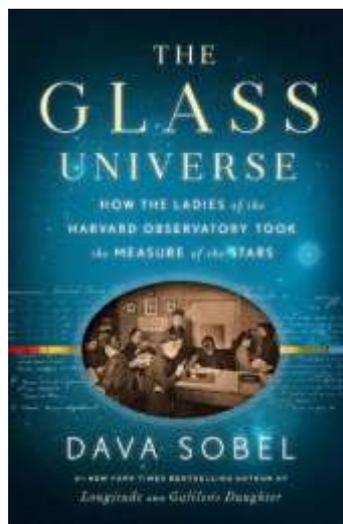
In this book, Cunningham picks up where his *Discovery of the First Asteroid, Ceres* left off in telling the story of the impact created by the discovery of this new class of object in the early 1800s. The best and brightest minds of mathematics, science, and philosophy were fascinated by Ceres,

and figures as diverse as Gauss, Herschel, Brougham, Kant, and Laplace all contributed something to the conversation. The first few chapters deal with the

mathematical and philosophical aspects of the discovery, and the rivalry between Germany and France that so affected science and astronomy of that era. The jockeying for glory over the discovery of Ceres by both Piazzi and Bode is examined in detail, as is the reception given to Herschel's use of the word 'asteroid'. Archival research that reveals the creator of the word 'asteroid' is presented in this book.

Astronomy was a truly cosmopolitan field at the time, spanning across various disciplines, and the discovery of Pallas, a story completely told in these pages, exemplifies the excitement and drama of early 1800s astronomy. Private correspondence about the study of Ceres and Pallas in 1802 is given here, which helps to contextualize and personalize the discovery.

[The Glass Universe](#), by Dava Sobel (Haper Collins – Fourth Estate), Jan 2017, pp.400 (hardback, £16.99), ISBN 9780007548187



In the mid-nineteenth century, the Harvard College Observatory began employing women as calculators, or 'human computers', to interpret the observations made via telescope by their male counterparts each night. At the outset this group included the wives, sisters, and daughters of the resident astronomers, but by the 1880s the female corps

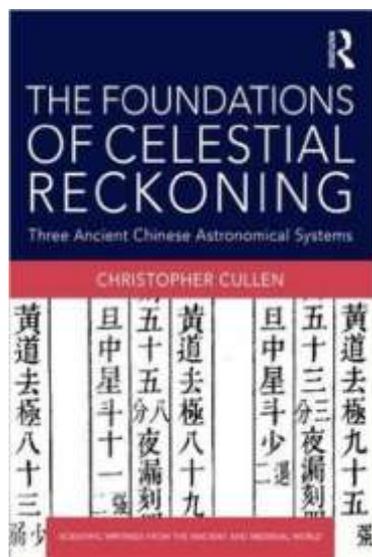
included graduates of the new women's colleges — Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith. As photography transformed the practice of astronomy, the ladies turned to studying the stars captured nightly on glass photographic plates.

The 'glass universe' of half a million plates that Harvard amassed in this period enabled the women to make extraordinary discoveries that attracted worldwide acclaim. They helped discern what stars were made of, divided the stars into meaningful categories for further research, and found a way to measure distances across space by starlight.

Elegantly written and enriched by excerpts from letters, diaries, and memoirs, *The Glass Universe* is the hidden history of a group of remarkable women who, through their hard work and groundbreaking discoveries, disproved the commonly held belief that the gentler sex had little to contribute to human knowledge.

The Foundations of Celestial Reckoning: Three Ancient Chinese Astronomical Systems, by

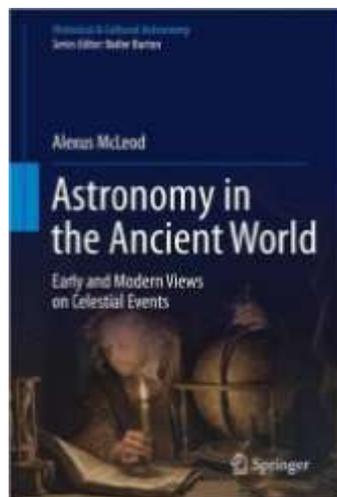
Christopher Cullen (Routledge), Sep 2016, pp.440 (hardback, £85.00), ISBN 9781138101173



The Foundations of Celestial Reckoning gives the reader direct access to the foundational documents of the tradition of calculation created by astronomers of the early Chinese empire between the late second century BCE and the third century CE. The paradigm they established was to shape East Asian thought and practice

in the field of mathematical astronomy for centuries to come. It was in many ways radically different from better known traditions of astronomy in other parts of the ancient world.

Astronomy in the Ancient World, by Alexis McLeod (Springer), Jul 2016, pp.234 (hardback, £82.00), ISBN 9783319235998

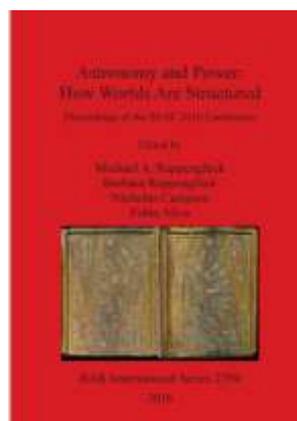


Alexis McLeod explores aspects of the lesser-known history of astronomy in the Americas (Mesoamerica and North America), China and India, each through the frame of particular astronomical phenomena. *Part One* considers the development of astronomy in the Americas as a response, in part, to the Supernova

of 1054, which may have led to a cultural renaissance in astronomy. He then goes on to explore the contemporary understanding of supernovae, contrasting it with that of the ancient Americas. *Part Two* is framed through the appearances of great comets, which had major divinatory significance in early China. The author discusses the advancement of observational astronomy in China, its influence on politics and its role in the survival or failure of

empires. Furthermore, the contemporary understanding of comets is also discussed for comparison. *Part Three*, on India, considers the magnificent observatories of the Rajput king Jai Singh II, and the question of their purpose. The origins of Indian astronomy are examined in Vedic thought and its development is followed through the period of Jai Singh, including the role played by solar eclipses. In the final section of the book, McLeod discusses how ancient traditions might help modern civilization better understand Earth's place in the cosmos..

Astronomy and Power: How Worlds are Structured, by M.A. & B. Rappenglück, N.Campion, and F.Silva (British Archaeological Reports Publishing), 2016, pp.302 (paperback, £47.00), ISBN 9781407314419

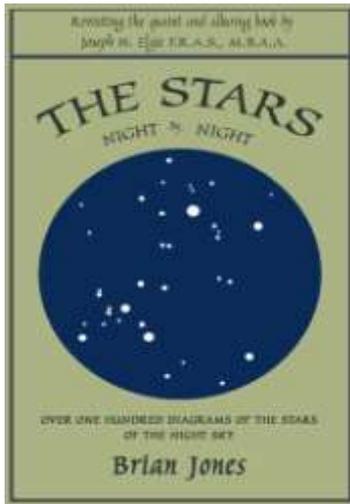


The Proceedings of the SEAC 2010 Conference. Throughout the course of history, from early prehistory to the Space Age, power structures have existed which have been more or less derived from

or correlated to astronomical phenomena or certain cosmologies and cosmovisions. These have significantly affected and formed the economic, social, political, artistic and religious life of people across different cultures. Cosmographies, time reckoning and calendar systems, celestial navigation techniques, landscape and architectural models of cosmic potency, celestial divination and astrological ideas, cosmic clothing and other related concepts have been used successfully by interest groups to establish, maintain and expand psychological, social, religious and political power. Furthermore, the celestial sphere and its inhabitants have also been closely connected and partially interwoven with the concept of the manifestation of cosmic order and power both in nature and in culture. The book's 43 chapters cover numerous aspects of the topic, from general ideas to astronomy and politics in the Modern Age.

The Stars Night by Night, by Brian Jones (Candy Jar Books), May 2016, pp.381 (hardback, £12.00), ISBN 9780993519246

Since Joseph Henry Elgie's original book *Stars Night by Night* was published in 1914 we have lost none of the wonder and fascination of the night sky. This book is a celebration of his work.



Stars Night by Night is relevant for any year and any level of knowledge. It is sprinkled with quotes from Joseph Henry Elgie (1864-1937), which take us back to his observing experiences, as well as thoughts and observations from other astronomers of his era and before. It includes a 7-page biography of Elgie.

The Time Travelling Stargazer, by Len Adam (self), Jun 2016, pp.474 (Kindle only, £3.50), ASIN B01H9E4GAY

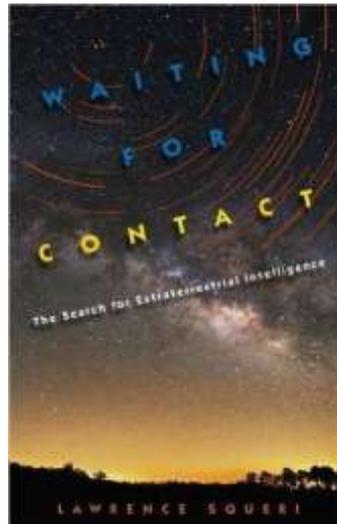


This book is based on actual observations from an amateur astronomer of the early 20th century and an amateur astronomer of the early 21st century. Each of these spent an entire year observing the sky and recording their observations on a month by month basis. The 20th Century amateur was Joseph Elgie, who was a naked eye observer. He

recorded the changing aspects of the constellations in his journal, based on observations throughout the year of 1907, using his own sketches to support his descriptions. Len Adam was the second amateur and recorded his observations using all of the 21st Century technology at his disposal throughout the year of 2014, supported by his images, diagrams and charts. The book includes a substantial section on Elgie's life and works.

Waiting for Contact: The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, by Lawrence Squeri (University Press of Florida), Sep 2016, pp.208 (hardback, £26.50), ISBN 9780813062143

Squeri looks at the people, the reasons, the goals, and the mindsets behind SETI. He shows how it started as an expression of the times, a way out of Cold War

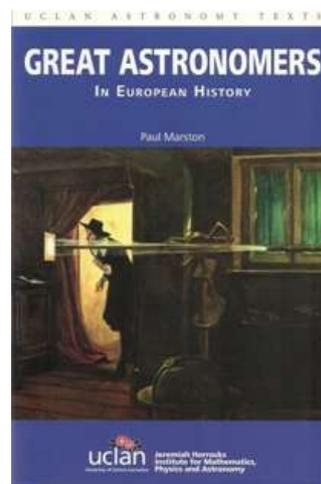


angst with hope for a better world. SETI's early advocates thought that with guidance from technically and ethically advanced outsiders, humanity might learn how to avoid horrors like global warfare and economic crisis and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Squeri also describes the challenges SETI has faced over the years: the struggle to be taken seriously by the scientific community and by NASA, competition for access to radio telescopes, perpetual lack of funding, and opposition by the government.

BOOKS MISSED

Great Astronomers in European History, by Paul Marston (University of Central Lancashire), 2014, pp.496 (paperback, £18.20), ISBN 9781901922974



This book is based on a course of the same name run by the University of Central Lancashire. It is about some of the great astronomers in the history of astronomy up to about 1900. It is not some kind of catalogue of discoveries, nor does it try to be a comprehensive history of astronomy. Its

interest is in the dynamics of discovery and how this interacted with the social and psychological features of some of the seminal figures. There are no 'fathers of', for this is a mistaken understanding of how science works, but there have been some fascinating, innovative, and brilliant characters in astronomy history. (The book is only available via Amazon Market Place. *Ed.*)

Note: *The descriptions of the books above are largely taken from the publishers. They are not reviews and do not imply endorsement by the SHA.*

WEB-LINKS NOTICED

The Unknown Copernicus: Spies, Printers, Amazons, and Body-Snatchers in an Age of Astronomical Revolution

An interesting [lecture by Dr Karl Galle](#), delivered at the Linda Hall Library in May 2016: ‘We remember Nicholas Copernicus primarily as the first modern astronomer to propose that the Earth does not rest in the centre of the universe, but rather moves in orbit around the Sun. Most of his professional life, however, was spent not in astronomy but in working as a church government official who oversaw political negotiations, property and boundary disputes, and even a short military campaign during an era of extraordinary political and social upheaval. This talk explores some of these other features of Copernicus’s time, including the colourful cast of characters who intersected with his life and work.’

HAD News

The April 2016 issue (no.87) of *HAD News*, the Newsletter of the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society, is [now available for download](#),

It includes features on the *US Naval Astronomical Expedition to Chile, 1849-52* (by Steve Dick); *Georgian Astronomical Manuscripts* (by Irakli Simonia); and the *Flood threat to Harvard Photographic Plates* (by Camille Carlisle)

Historical and Cultural Astronomy

A new series of books on [Historical & Cultural Astronomy](#) has been announced by the publisher Springer. The series is stated to be for ‘high-level monographs and edited volumes covering a broad range of subjects in the history of astronomy, including interdisciplinary contributions from historians, sociologists, horologists, archaeologists, and other humanities fields. Rather than focusing on the scientific findings alone, these volumes explain the context of astronomical and space science progress from the pre-modern world to the future.’

The series ‘offers a home for books addressing astronomical progress from a humanities perspective, encompassing the influence of religion, politics, social movements, and more on the growth of astronomical knowledge over the centuries’. The editorial board, chaired by W Butler Burton, includes Simon Mitton, James Evans, James Lequeux, Wayne Orchiston,

Virginia Trimble, and other noted historians of astronomy.

Culture and Cosmos

[Culture and Cosmos, Vol 10](#) (2007) *The Worship of the Stars in Japan*, is now on-line. Much of the catalogue of Culture and Cosmos is now also on-line, supported by the University of Wales and the Sophia Centre. This is a peer-reviewed academic journal in the history of astrology and cultural astronomy published in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology (University of Wales).

Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford

From April 2016 until the beginning of 2018, the Museum will be packing its off-site collections in preparation for their move to a new location. The move, which will be within Oxford, will help the Museum provide better online descriptions, higher quality images, and will improve storage conditions.

Progress with the packing and the move will be recorded on the Museum blog [Inside MHS](#). Look out for requests for your assistance with mystery items, reports on the unusual objects encountered and some novel packing solutions!

Online resources for lunatics

James Dawson (SHA Librarian) writes:

‘Whilst working on the library catalogue I’ve discovered an immense number of very high resolution images and countless scientific and historically interesting reports on the Moon dating back to the 1960s—including many NASA publications. There are also digital copies of many books relating to the Moon, which are free to access. This is all brought together on the [Lunar and Planetary Institute’s website](#). The website, and the online library in particular, are worth exploring.’

MEET OUR MEMBERS

SHA members introduce themselves and their interests

In this issue: *Bill Leatherbarrow (Sheffield)*



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

The SHA is a great organisation and it plays a very distinctive role on UK astronomy. I joined only relatively recently, but I have been aware of the Society since its inception. I suppose I never really thought of myself as an historian, but I eventually came to recognise how important a sense of the past was for the kind of work I did do.

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

I am essentially a practical observer of the Moon and planets, so my historical interests are primarily in the field of Solar System observational history. I do take a general interest in the broader picture presented by the history of astronomy, but in more specific terms it is the fascinating story of how the Moon and planets have been explored since the invention of the telescope that most engages me.

What got you hooked on that?

It's just the most compelling story! The struggle against practical difficulties; the gradual stripping away of illusions; the balance of imagination and exploration; the fact that it's the greatest voyage of discovery ever made by humans – what's not to like!

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

I think it is the sense that when you sit down at the telescope to observe or image the Moon and planets in a serious way, you are locating yourself in a long and distinguished tradition and participating in that great voyage of discovery—even if only in a very small way.

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

I actively observe whenever the Sheffield seeing permits, but increasingly I find myself digging into the history. I have written a few articles on the history of lunar observation in particular, and I am currently completing a book about the Moon that has a strong historical orientation. As Director of the BAA Lunar Section I am particularly interested in the history of that organisation. It has made such a contribution to the history of selenography since its inception in 1890 and, with the help of others, I have spent a lot of time trying to reclaim its historical record by tracking down and restoring lost items to the archive. Perhaps one day I might be tempted to write the history of the BAA Lunar Section!

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

Ralph Belknap Baldwin's *The Face of the Moon* (1949)

Why?

For making the arguments in favour of an impact origin for the craters of the Moon unassailable. It has been argued that Baldwin discovered 'the DNA of the Moon'. Certainly, the subsequent development of lunar (and Solar System) science has shown that he got nearly everything right.

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

The SHA does a fine job as it stands. I thought the 2015 joint meeting at Greenwich with the BAA Historical Section was remarkable, and I hope we shall see more of this kind of collaboration in future.

SHA SURVEY OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY

Housekeeping of the Survey website, by updating entries with sources and references, has continued. Some entries have also been moved around. This is to reflect the tightened-up geographic areas of the counties, namely mid-20th century prior to major government re-organisation. This can be tricky as our major metropolitan areas have been continually chipping away at adjacent historical counties. In the case of Greater London, the Coordinator (Kevin Johnson) has adopted the division of the County of London (Corporation of London) with the County of Middlesex that existed from the 1880s to 1965. From a historical point of view someone may have been born or lived in part of Essex that was covered by the County of London.

All the relevant entries from Derek Howse's Greenwich List have now been added. This has highlighted some notable absences, namely that Birr Castle, the home Lord Rosse's great telescope, was missing: An omission that has now been rectified. The Coordinator has also started the process of contacting astronomical societies to update and check their entries. We would be grateful if members in the various local societies could consider supplying such updates.

The most notable matter that surfaced recently was not from the survey site, but from a general enquiry to the SHA via Mark Hurn at the IoA in Cambridge, requesting help in identifying a picture of an observatory. This has now been confirmed to be a picture of Joseph Barclay's Observatory at Knott House, Leyton, London. With the permission from the owner, the image will be added to the County of London Survey page shortly.

The SHA was recently contacted by someone associated with the *Brisbane Observatory Trust* to point out the omission from the Survey of the notable observatory at Largs, Scotland, which was established by the Soldier-Astronomer Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane (1773-1860). The observatory was one of the first in Scotland and was the prototype for Australia's first permanent observatory also built by Sir Thomas Brisbane. According to our correspondent: 'it has lost its timber roof and floors and a little bit of the stone wall has fallen down but there is enough for it to be rebuilt and restored, at which a local group are working'. Two sets of Meridian Pillars linked to the observatory survive. One set lies to the south of the remains of the observatory and the other is in Waterside Street, Largs. A short [video showing the remains of the observatory](#) has been made available

on-line by Coast TV – Scotland (see from 6.00 min onward).

If you know of any old observatories in the UK that are missing from the Survey, please help us to rectify the omissions.

SHA ON THE ROAD

The SHA had a successful stall at the **Institute of Astronomy Open Afternoon** (19 March 2016, Cambridge), with assistance from Norma Foster, Mark Hurn, Eric Hutton, Mike and Pat Leggett, Terry Stancliffe and Paul Whiting.



SHA publicity stall at the IoA
(photo: Mike Leggett)

Volunteers have offered to assist at other events in 2016 as follows:

North West Astronomy Festival (1/3 Jul 2016, Runcorn): Gerard Gilligan

South West Astrofair (13 Aug 2016, Norman Lockyer Observatory, Devon): John Chuter, Carolyn Kennett and Paul Whiting

BMI Open Heritage Day (10 Sep 2016): Mike Leggett

Federation of Astronomical Societies Convention (22 Oct, Birmingham): Mike & Pat Leggett

Starfest (North Essex AS) is problematic this year as it is being held on 29 Oct 2016, the same day as our Autumn Conference and AGM.

If you will be at 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, please contact the Publicity Officer, Mike Leggett: leggett189@btinternet.com

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Lots of things are happening at the moment. I am sure that those of you who attended our Spring Conference in Bath will agree that it was another very successful event, this time with the William Herschel Society. The joint meeting concept is proving its worth in not only providing a broad mix of talks, but also in helping to recruit new members – a subject which you will already know is dear to my heart.



Bob Bower, SHA Chairman

This *e-News* will be arriving in your inboxes as some of us gather to attend this year's Summer Picnic at *Hanwell Community Observatory*. The response from the membership for this event has been very good, to the point where we achieved the maximum possible attendees that the venue could take. It will turn out to be probably the best attended such event in recent years. It would be great to see a similar record broken in Oct for the Autumn Conference.

There have been some significant changes in Council since the last *e-News*. The Vice-Chairman's post remained unfilled at the last AGM. However, I am very pleased to announce that David Sellers has agreed to be co-opted into the job for the remainder of this session. He is ideally suited to the role as a founder member with three years Council service under his belt as *e-News* Editor, a role he will continue to fill. David has reported the move of Gerard Gilligan into the Membership Secretary post elsewhere in this issue, consequent upon the resignation of Mike Shaw. I would like to echo his comments on Mike's contribution this session. Mike is a busy man jobwise—and it is all too easy for us retirees to forget what earning a crust was like...

Our two new *Bulletin* editors, Carolyn Kennett and Len Adam, have now been co-opted onto Council. We were very impressed with their plans for their first issue, which they presented at the last Council meeting. Their enthusiasm and commitment to a regular publication schedule shone through. The *Bulletin* format they propose is fresh and very appealing in my view. I hope you will agree when you receive issue 26 in the very first week of October.

These Council moves have generated a vacancy – that of Events Manager, as reported by David elsewhere herein. We really would like to co-opt a willing volunteer for the remainder of this session, with a view to standing for election at the Oct AGM.

A couple of years ago we distributed a membership survey questionnaire. The response was a little disappointing – in fact the number of replies were so few as not to be statistically significant. Council has decided to have another go – but this time it will be an on-line process, courtesy of James Dawson and John Chuter. I do hope you will take the time to reply. As I believe I've said before, we are doing our best to provide what we think you want – but it would be so much better if we really knew.

Whilst I'm on membership items, I'd like to welcome the following new members, who have joined since the last *e-News*:

Nicholas Campion, Jonathan Gale, Roger Moses, Paul McHugh, Robert Pickford, Marco Prunotto, William Tarver

Finally, and by no means least, I wish to pay tribute to the late Madeline Cox for her amazingly generous bequest to the Society in her Will. We are now £37K richer as a result. This shows just how much a part of her life the Society represented. Council is actively considering ways of formally recognising this truly substantial gift.

Bob Bower (chairman@shastro.org.uk)

INFORMATION WANTED

Davis Edmondson Benson (1860–1937)

Following his appeal in the last *SHA e-News* for information about D.E. Benson—and particularly for information about where to get hold of a copy of Benson's 1913 book, *The Making of a Speculum*, Gerard Gilligan received useful bits of information from several SHA members. The most pleasant surprise, however, was to be informed that a copy of the long-lost tome was residing in the Library of the Liverpool Astronomical Society: under Gerard's nose all the time!

If *you* want information or tips relating to a current history of astronomy research topic, please feel free to place an appeal in future issues of *SHA e-News*.



Gerard with Benson's 1913 book

OTHER MEETINGS & EXHIBITIONS NOTICED (non-SHA)

Understanding the Space environment before the space age

A [RAS Specialist Discussion Meeting](#) organised by Luke Barnard, Chris Scott and Mat Owens. This will take place on Fri 10 Feb 2017 10:30–15:30 at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, London, W1J 0BQ.

Birmingham and Midland Institute Heritage Open Day

Saturday 10 September 2016, at the BMI, Birmingham
Heritage Open Days is England's biggest heritage festival involving 40,000 volunteers. It celebrates the country's history, architecture and culture; offering people the chance to see hidden places and try out new experiences. (See pages 4-5)

Famous astronomy books in exhibition to celebrate 600 years of Cambridge University Library

Some of the most famous books in the history of astronomy are currently on display in the exhibition centre of the Cambridge University Library. These include a copy of the *De Revolutionibus* of Copernicus (1543) and the copy of *Principia* (1687) that belonged to Isaac Newton himself! There are several other old astronomical volumes on display, and also some more modern items illustrating the work of Arthur Eddington on gravity, and the discovery of Pulsars in Cambridge.

Not only is Astronomy represented, but many of the other great cultural and scientific treasures held by the Library are on display to celebrate 600 years of its existence. The exhibition is free and open until the end of September 2016 at the [Milstein Exhibition Centre](#).

If you can't make to the exhibition in person (or just want to enjoy some fascinating images on your screen) there is an [online virtual version](#).

e-News CONTACT DETAILS

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

General communications to the Society should be sent to the **General Secretary** (Laura Carroll): lauracarroll55@hotmail.com

SUMMARY DATES FOR THE DIARY

2016 MEETINGS

10 Sep BMI Open Day. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

12-16 Sep 24th SEAC Conference in Bath. *Details given in previous issue (See SEAC website)*

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

2017 MEETINGS

22 Apr SHA Spring Conference, at the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*

28 Oct SHA Autumn Conference and AGM, at the Birmingham & Midland Institute. *Details given elsewhere in this issue.*
