The British Astronomical Association
Historical Section

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From the Director
Mike Frost

I hope that you enjoyed our section meeting in Birmingham this year. It was great to meet up in person once again after a series of webinars. We had a great lineup of speakers. The numbers attending were a little down on pre-pandemic times, but those who did come had a great time. Thanks to all our speakers, especially John Chuter, who stood in at short notice.

We have two upcoming events to tell you about. We wondered whether the turnout for Birmingham indicated that there was still a place for webinars, and so we organised a webinar for 8PM on Wednesday November 22nd. Professor Nick Lomb of the University of Southern Queensland will be joining to talk about "The Australian eclipses of 1857 and 1871: Advances in Technology". Nick was one of the co-authors of Eclipse Chasers, which I reviewed (favourably) for the Journal in February.

Our next real-world section meeting will take place in Ipswich, perhaps at the Museum Street Methodist Church, in spring next year, Saturday May 18th, hosted by the deputy section director, Bill Barton, and the Orwell Astronomical Society (Ipswich).

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In the last edition of the newsletter, I told you about a project we started, to try to find everyone in the BAA who has an asteroid named after them. I published a list, including the recent additions of pioneering women from the early years of the BAA, which Rik Hill of the Catalina Sky Survey has secured for us. I then asked the newsletter readership to let me know if I had missed anyone.

I was pretty well certain that there would be some names I had missed off, but the feedback was more than I had ever expected. Two people, Nick James and Wayne Orchiston, nominated themselves; Wayne and I also had a discussion on Antipodean candidates, which yielded a couple more names, including comet discoverer John Tebbutt. James Dawson nominated Alan Heath, who memoirs he has just brought to print.

Peter Meadows came up with a list of fourteen names, all valid. Peter then went on to write some Python code to feed all the names from our obituaries database into the database of asteroids. This generated a further forty candidates, all valid. (We were contemplating feeding the entire database of BAA members into the programme, however there was too much of a risk of false-positives; members who shared their names with actual asteroid "owners".)

However, the star of the show has to be former section director Tony Kinder, who came up with an extraordinary one hundred and thirty names, all valid, nearly doubling the number of names on the list.

Well done all – especially Tony.

I have passed on all the names we have uncovered to Richard Miles, director of the Asteroids and Remote Planets section. We will be producing a joint webpage featuring all the asteroids named for BAA members, together with the orbital parameters. We hope to encourage observers to spot as many as possible of the names on the list.

Happy hunting!

Breaking News – Our campaign to honour pioneering women from the BAA's early days, by naming asteroids for them, has been noticed. Journalist Donna Ferguson contacted me this week about an article she wrote about Annie Maunder (asteroid 50726) and Alice Everett (50727), which appeared in the Sep 10th edition of the Observer (UK newspaper) and online at
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/sep/10/giant-leap-for-women-early-lady-astronomers-have-asteroids-named-in-their-honour

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Finally, an appeal to BAA members in the Midlands who have some expertise in renovating old telescopes. I live in Rugby, Warwickshire, and I have been working with Rugby School and others to research the history of their school observatory. The Temple Observatory was established primarily by George Seabroke, BAA president 1900-1902, who was a pupil at the school and then a solicitor in the town. Rugby School's astronomy club is called the Seabroke Society in his honour. Seabroke observed with other leading Victorian astronomers including Norman Lockyer (born in Rugby), James Maurice Wilson of Rugby School; and perhaps Revd George Fisher, who I wrote about in a recent paper in the Journal [1].

The observatory has a historic 8¼ inch Clark refractor, which has seen better days [2]. I have observed through it, a few years ago, but even then, it was not in good condition.

Is there are anyone out there who would be willing to help restore this beautiful old telescope? Email me if you are interested.

Mike Frost

(1) "The Revd George Fisher (1787-1873): Arctic Astronomer", Frost, M.A., *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, vol.132, no.6, p.343-350
(2) "The 8¼ inch Clark refractor of the Temple Observatory, Rugby", Marriott, R. A., *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, vol.101, no.6, p.365-372

A Visit to *l'Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo*

By Patrick F. Kavanagh

"To have seen Italy without having seen Sicily,
Is not to have seen Italy at all,
For Sicily is the clue to everything."
Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe.

A visit to an observatory should be an unforgettable adventure and a unique learning experience. Our visit to l'*Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo* was just that, and much more than what we could have expected!

In Palermo, in the year 1786, the newly appointed "enlightened" viceroy of Palermo, ***Francisco d'Aquino*** *set out on a project to fill the void of higher education institutions on the Island of Sicily after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 by order of King Carlos III, and the subsequent closing of their schools, establishing the Regia Accademia di Studi, or Royal Academy of Studies, a forerunner of what now is the University of Palermo. Father* ***Giuseppe Piazzi****, a priest from Northern Italy, who had been assigned as lecturer of Philosophy and of Mathematics at la Accademia in 1781 was asked to take over the newly projected department of Astronomy in 1786. Piazzi, realizing the size of and the significance of the challenge of building from scratch a Faculty of Astronomy and its Observatory, immediately requested a two-year sabbatical to confer with experts and instrument suppliers both in Paris and London. Thus began the history of the l'Osservatorio di Palermo.*

With this introduction, **Dr. Ileana Chinnici** began our private visit to one of the most interesting and majestic, but possibly least known, historic observatories in Southern Europe.

In 2021, I read Dr. Ileana Chinnici´s very interesting book *"Angelo Secchi and Nineteenth Century Science: The Multidisciplinary Contributions of a Pioneer and Innovator",* and made a mental note to ask her for a personal interview at her office at the *INAF* (*Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica*) on my upcoming trip to Sicily.

To meet Dr. Ileana Chinnici and to visit the *l'Osservatorio di Palermo* was a unique experience, full of marvelous and unexpected surprises, which Estela, my wife, and I will treasure for many years to come.

Our first challenge was finding *l'Osservatorio*. The address looked conspicuous: *"Piazza del Parlamento, #1"*: I was unaware that Palermo even had a parliament.

At our hotel's front desk, we asked the concierge to find us a driver to take us to the "*l´Osservatorio*". *"Qual' osservatorio?"* was his reply. We showed the driver the address, to which he answered *"Si, Si! Palazzo Reale!"* At this point, we had no idea where we were headed: to an *Observatory*, to a *Parliamentary Building* or to a *Royal Palace*? During our ride, the taxi driver gave us an ample history lesson about the Royal Palace, or as he called it, "*il Palazzo dei Normanni*", as the Norman King Roger II established his court here in the year 1130 AD.

However interesting our destination would be, I was lost to understand how an Observatory could share the same site as a Norman Fortress, a Royal Palace and a

Parliamentary building. “I don’t believe that this driver has an idea of where he is taking us,” I whispered to Estela. She cautiously replied, “Let’s just wait and see!”

Palazzo Reale, Palermo

Only a few minutes later, we arrived at *"Palazzo Reale"*, where *"il Parlamento"* was in session, judging by the Italian National and European Community flags, and several black Mercedes limousines parked outside with their uniformed chauffeurs in waiting. The *"Palazzo"* lives up to its name, *"Reale"*: an impressive edifice, both in size as well as in beauty, which faces an even more impressive *"Piazza del Parlamento"*, a stunning promenade with pearl-like pebbles forming a pathway curving around a well-manicured renaissance-style garden. We noticed a central portal, the obvious entrance for dignitaries, so we walked over to a secondary side portal, without any indication of a nearby observatory. The mid-afternoon sun lit up the neoclassical façade of the Palazzo, giving it a storybook aura of fantasy. And *"l'Osservatorio"*?

As we entered the portal, we informed the security guard, stationed behind the window of his bullet-proof enclosure, "We have an appointment here at the Observatory". When he replied, *"L'osservatore?"*, I was sure we were in the wrong place. *"Yes! Please! With Dr. Ileana Chinnici, please! We have an appointment,"* I insisted desperately. *"Oh,'* the guard replied. *"Your documents, please!"* Then he added, *"…and please kindly put your brief case and everything in your pockets on the conveyor belt."*

At this point, a member of Dr. Chinnici´s team appeared on the other side of the security gate, and kindly greeted us. I asked, *"Where are we?"* She informed us that we had arrived to what was originally the Fortress of the Normans, which during the 18th and 19th centuries was the Royal Palace of the Viceroy of the *Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*, which was governed by King Ferdinand of Spain during the time the first astronomical observatory was established in Palermo, and that since the end of World War II had become the seat of the regional parliament of Sicily. Suddenly, we were making sense out of our confusion, and the reason for the passports and security check.

"This way please", we were invited to enter an elevator. When we arrived to the top floor, we undertook a series of winding staircases, on the way to *"l'Osservatorio"*. We finally entered into a stately room with a beautiful wooden meeting table, where Dr. Eleana Chinnici awaited our arrival together with her entourage of young collaborators.

Dr. Eleana Chinnici very timely, after a kind and warm welcome, gave us an overview of Sicily in the context of the last quarter of the 18th Century, and the significant role played by *Francesco d'Aquino* as well as by *Father Giuseppe Piazzi*. Dr. Ileana Chinnici has a special talent in making the past feel present, to the degree that we felt that several portraits of the characters being discussed hanging on the adjacent wall were spying on us, as if they were eavesdropping, having heard mentioned their names.

***Francesco d'Aquino**, 1738-1795, Prince of Caramanico, was born in Naples. D'Aquino was appointed ambassador of Naples in London in 1780, where he became member of the Royal Society. In 1786, d'Aquino was appointed Viceroy of Sicily, with the mission to continue the political, social and cultural reforms initiated by Domenico Caracciolo, the former viceroy of Sicily, and also a member of the Royal Society.*

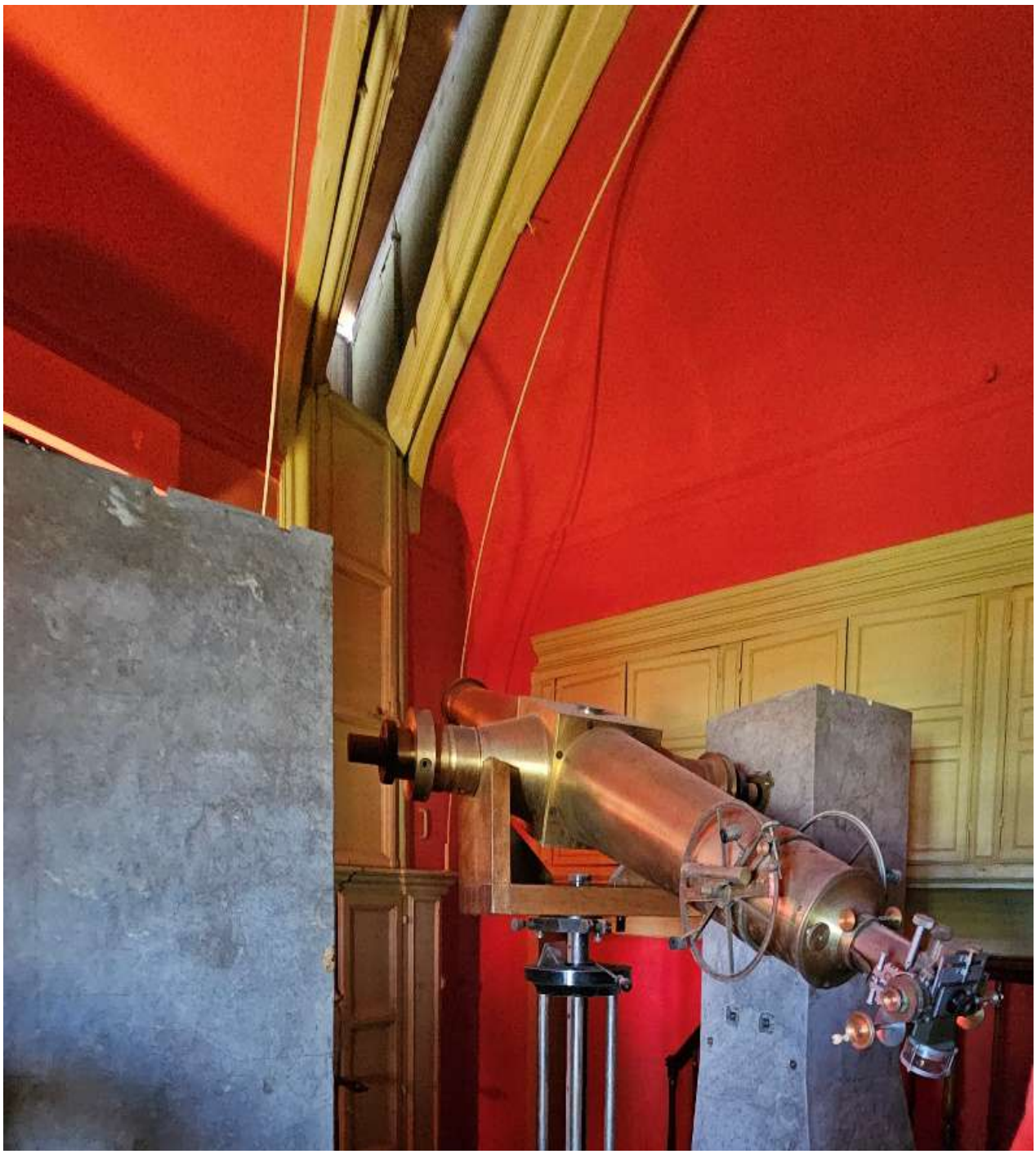
***Father Giuseppe Piazzi**, parted for Paris in April, 1787, where he met several important French Astronomers, and established a close professional relationship with Joseph Jerome Lalande (1732-1807), renowned for his work with the Transit of Venus in 1769.*

After only five months in France, Giuseppe Piazzi left for London. Piazzi had a clear vision that he would only be able to establish an Observatory capable of producing a competent Astronomical Catalogue, if it could count on an instrument with the

ability of determining meridional declination measurements with an accuracy beyond 1 arc second.

Once landed in England, Piazzi presented his letter of introduction, written by Lalande, to the Astronomer Royal at the Greenwich Observatory. Upon inspecting Bird's Mural Quadrant, Piazzi understood its limitations, and thus opted for a Circular design, which brought him into contact with Jesse Ramsden.

After this introduction to the historical context and to the personalities of the genesis of the Observatory of Palermo, Dr. Ileana Chinnici invited us to exit the meeting room and to proceed to the *Stanza Meridiana to* take our first glimpse of these famous 18th Century instruments inside a small domed Observatory.



Sala Meridiana with *Pistor & Martin* Meridian Circle

We immediately noticed something strange about this Observatory room. In all our visits to domed observatories, we always witnessed a light-weight moveable roof that rotates around a circular wall, supported by wheels or bearings to ease its movements. Here we saw no device intended to permit the dome to circulate around the wall. The only opening in the dome was a 30-centimeter-wide *fenditura*, or slit. running from one horizon to the opposite, dividing the hemispheric dome in two halves. I just stared up at the slit, bewildered!

Ileana Chinnici broke me out of the trance with a very simple explanation: “It’s the meridian!” Now I understood why this area was called the *Stanza Meridiana.*

It came clear that this was not the famous Ramsden Circle, but rather the Pistor & Martin Meridian Circle, because all movement was constrained by two huge columns of grey *Billiemi* marble, placed on each side, trapping the optical tube to move along on just one axis: **Declination.** This Circle was built in Germany, in 1856, under the careful supervision of Johann Franz Encke, the director of the Berlin Observatory. The optical tube has an aperture of 129mm, and a focal length of 1880mm.

“The timing of the Meridian pass?”, I asked, still not fully understanding what we were observing.

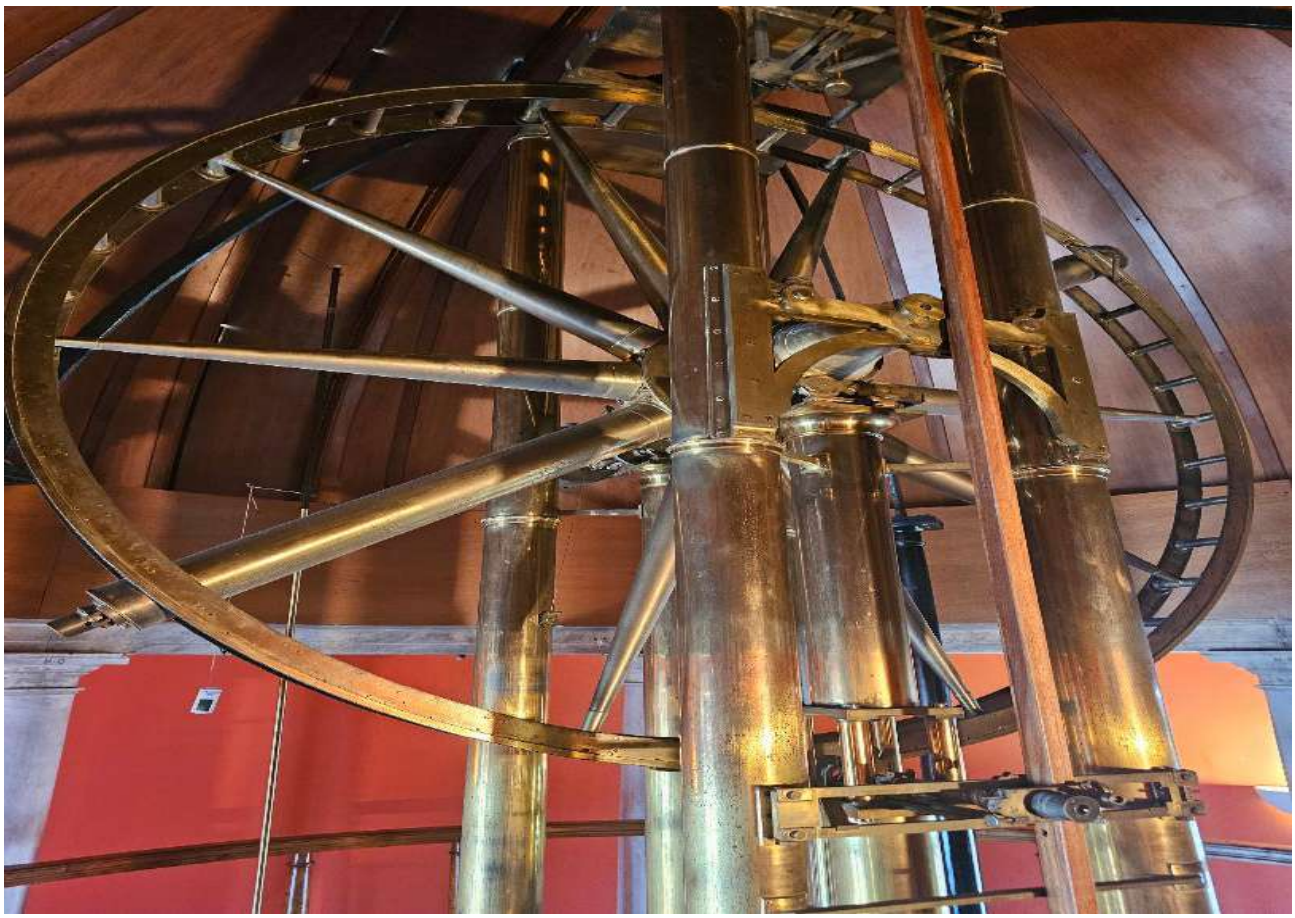
Dr. Chinnici pointed towards the corner of the room. A *Mudge & Dutton* pendulum clock (London, 1792) stood in noble silence. Father Piazzi chose this beautiful but apparently simple grandfather clock, as a precision scientific time piece, with its second hand with numbers every five seconds.

“And the Ramsden Circle?”, I anxiously inquired, as we left *Sala Meridionale*.

At this point, we backtracked through *“La Galleria degli Strumenti Mobili”*, and into the *“La Sala Circolare”*, with a much more normal wooden moveable Observatory-type roof, and the grandiose Ramsden Circle in the center surrounded by a temple like rotunda of white marble ionic pillars.

“Take a look through the eyepiece!”, Dr. Chinnici invited me. I didn’t understand. I thought the eyepiece would give me a view through the 3-inch diameter 5-foot-long telescope mounted in the *“Circle”* up to the sky, but the observatory roof was closed. As I peeked through the eyepiece, I realized I was looking through something similar to a microscope, at something that appeared to be a ruler of some type.

Eureka: all of a sudden, I realized what a clever invention I was examining, similar to a Theodolite, but much more complete. I have used Alt and Az angles lined on the sides of my home-built theodolite for years, but now I realized the task that Piazzi and Ramsden had set out to solve: to be able to track down objects not only in degrees, but 3,600 times more accurately, first dividing each degree into 60 minutes, and then each minute into 60 seconds. Both Piazzi and Ramsden realized that with the naked eye, this would be impossible. But with a microscope, this challenge was feasible. Unlike the Meridian Circle we had just seen, the Ramsden Circle was maneuverable in both altitude as well as Azimuth.



The Altitude circle of the Ramsden Telescope, Osservatorio di Palermo

Piazzi gave Ramsden the order for this *Circle* at the beginning of 1788, and by August, 1789, it was ready. 18 months was a record-breaking time for a project this size and this complex for Jesse Ramsden, but perhaps made possible by the semi daily *check-up* visits Giuseppe Piazzi paid to the Ramsden's shop during this period to survey progress and to inspect the instrument. Father Piazzi's *hands-on* approach was a vital element in his success.

Getting the *Circle* through British customs was no easy task, but when Ramsden proved that it was not a threat for national maritime security, the Circle was finally released and set sail for the Port of Naples, and eventually to its new home in Palermo, where Giuseppe Piazzi would employ it tirelessly to scan the heavens.

The 18th Century was over, giving rise to the 19th Century. It was January, 1801. That evening Piazzi spotted a strange object that he had never seen before. Over the following evenings he continued to track this object, but it was never in the exact same position in the star field, as if it were a planetary object, an object well within the boundaries of our solar system.

Piazzi might have imagined he had discovered a new planet of some kind, but he took a more conservative position of reporting it as a possible comet, although there was no tail. Piazzi shared his discovery, his doubts and his hypothesis with life-long friend and confidant, the Astronomer of the Brera Observatory, Bernaba Oriani. At one point, Piazzi lost track of this wandering object. Desperate, Carl Friedrich Gauss developed an equation that predicted when and where it would reappear. The new object came out of hiding in the exact position as calculated, not only by Gauss, but also by the Titius Bode law, between Mars and Jupiter, in the center of what we now know as the Asteroid belt.

The Azimuth circle of the Ramsden Telescope

Father Giuseppe Piazzi was offered a gold medal in recognition of this achievement, which he did not accept, preferring that the funds be used as seed money for the investment in a second dome and a *Troughton* equatorial telescope.

Ileana Chinnici led us to a third dome, built in a much more conventional observatory style, where we viewed a breathtaking bronze 250mm aperture *Merz* telescope mounted on a German equatorial mount that arrived in Palermo in 1859. This telescope proved vital in *Pietro Tacchini's* research on solar prominences. What proved to be of great help was that Pietro Tacchini was in constant communication with Angelo Secchi, who was conducting similar spectroscopic research at the same time at the Colegio Romano with a very similar Merz telescope. L'*Osservatorio* has a very rich collection of Spectroscopy instruments from this period, which prompted the establishment of the Italian Spectroscopy Society (*Societa di Spectrocopisti Italiani*), and its *"Memorie"* or Journal, one the first of its type in the world.

250mm aperture Merz Telescope at Palermo

At *I´Osservatorio di Palermo*, during our visit with Dr. Chinnici and her staff, as we listened to the stories of great astronomers and their feats, we gradually became aware not only of the practical usefulness of scientific instruments, such as the case of the Circle here at hand, but of their status as great works of art and human achievement in themselves. They expressed their feelings about the *Circle* as if it were the true protagonist of this grand planetary discovery, something with its own life, worthy of protection, admiration and loving care.

"Loving care" was not what the *"Circle"* nor the Merz telescope were subject to during many of the following years, and even up to the middle of the 20th Century, when the *Circle*, the Merz and especially the mounts were subject to haphazard scavenger activities. Parts were lost. But now Dr. Chinnici and her staff are fully dedicated to maintaining these artifacts in their original state for posterity.

At last, we had to deal with one final staircase, and at the top, a heavy metal door. We were weary at this point, mentally exhausted with our learning of Astronomical instruments, to the degree that I was about to say that we had seen enough for one day, when the door came ajar with a loud screech, opening up to a sudden blinding shower of light. We cautiously stepped out onto the rooftop *Terrazza Panoramica* of the Palazzo Reale as the sun was setting behind our backs, lighting up the Palermo skyline and the Mediterranean beyond in a fashion I had never seen, with the glimmering sandstone and granite giving off an auriferous glow in the golden hour. As you walk down *Corso Vittorio Emanuele*, you see close-up the scars that the passing of time has inflicted on the facades of countless palazzi. But from here, above the noise and bustling of crowds and street vendors, the true magnificence of the urban ensemble can be appreciated. The beauty of the Palermo downtown skyline lies in that it has avoided being marred by 20th century high-rise constructions and has kept intact its 18th century Baroque integrity.

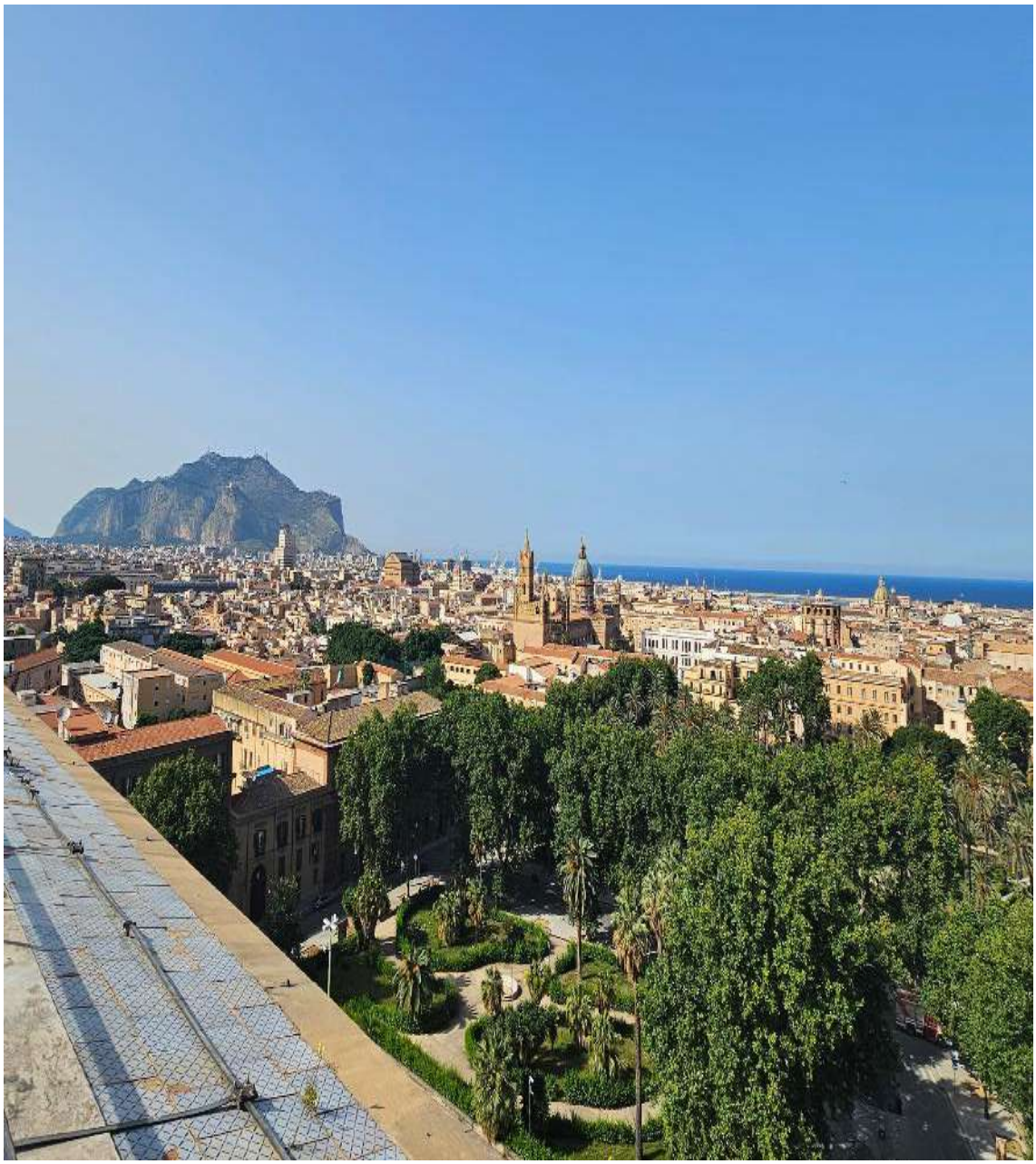
The three observatory domes stood behind us, appearing dark and ominous like cannon turrets awaiting to assault the heavens, as we watched the city below.

I was still overwhelmed by the emotion of reliving the exciting adventures of the discovery of Ceres, and thanks to Dr. Chinnici, feeling the closeness of Father Giuseppe, when I was assaulted by yet another thought as I contemplated the Cathedral Belltower. It dawned on me then that Father Piazzi was not only a globe-trotting scientist, but also *a man of the cloth*: a Catholic priest.

I am sure that Piazzi had come out onto this *Terrazza Panoramica* himself many a time to enjoy the view, or even to observe an object difficult to view from inside his observatory. He must have watched down as the bells awakened the first early-morning worshipers on their walk to daily Mass. Piazzi, the astronomer, the instrument designer, the university professor, was also Father Giuseppe, the priest, a man who lived in a religious community, read his Breviary or *"liturgy of the hours"*, administered the sacraments, heard confessions, blessed the sick, buried the dead, and celebrated daily Mass, consecrating bread and wine.

The most beautiful moment of the liturgical year in the life of Catholic Priest, particularly in a place like Sicily, is the celebration of the Epiphany, the early January feast when they celebrate the coming of the Maji, the three wisemen from the East who came following a strange star, in search of the "*newborn king"*. It is a feast that delights the imagination of small children and fills the hearts of adults as well, a celebration that joins simple pastors together with learned men of prestige, the humble and the powerful, the rich and the poor,

uniting them all in something we vaguely term *humanity*. It was precisely at that time of year, in the nights before January 6th, 1801, when Piazzi discovered his mysterious star in the heavens. Can you not imagine the tears falling down his face in emotion and in gratitude as he delivered his Epiphany sermon from the pulpit of the Cathedral down below, for he too had been able to discover a similar star in heaven at the dawn of a new Century?



Rooftop view of Palermo skyline and Mediterranean from l´Osservatorio

In a certain sense, perhaps the Enlightenment reached its fulfillment in Father Giuseppe Piazzi and men of his like, with whom groundbreaking research and science coexisted and flourished in the soul of a profoundly religious person of faith in millennial beliefs and principles, with each Human dimension of his hybrid nature nurturing the other.

With similar tears of emotion in my heart if not in my eyes, we were lead down the stairways, but this time we took a detour which led us to a different section of the Observatory, to a series of offices filled with of engineers busy working on models on their computers: we had entered into the INAF (*Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica)* of Palermo,

where cutting-edge research is being carried out in the area of radio Astronomy. This is precisely the mystical charm of ***l'Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo***: you never know to which century it will lead you, any time you turn a corner. Here Dr. Chinnici introduced us with the Director, Dr. Fabrizio Bocchino, who was very keen on listening to what we were doing in Mexico with our Astronomy Club, and especially our recent course for adults in DSLR-diffraction grating Spectroscopy.

Dr. Chinnici, Dr. Bocchino, Estela and Me

A final treat awaited us as we passed through the beautiful central courtyard of the Palazzo, with its columned-arched corridors flanking all four sides, preserved in its splendid *Herrerian* style architecture so characteristic of the Hapsburgs in the times of King Phillip II, both in Spain as well as in Mexico, with period horse-pulled coaches of the Bourbon era.

Arched corridor courtyard at Palazzo Reale, Palermo

Period coaches in Courtyard

Estela and I will cherish the memories of this unforgettable visit to the *Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo*, and we extend our gratitude to Dr. Bocconi, his staff, and especially to Dr. Ileana Chinnici for offering us the possibility of such an enriching experience.

Patrick Kavanagh

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Postscript from Mike Frost

I enjoyed reading Patrick's wonderful article about the Palermo Observatory – doesn't it make you want to visit! I thought I'd add a brief postscript about one small aspect of the story which I was familiar with, namely the discovery and then recovery of Ceres in 1801.

Piazzi discovered the minor planet early in 1801, observed it for forty nights and then lost it following a run of cloudy nights (plus ca change). The question was, how to use the few observations Piazzi had made, to compute an accurate orbit, from which it could be recovered.

We saw in Robert Persse's excellent article about Johannes Kepler ("Following Kepler" in Newsletter 26), that solving astronomical problems can inspire the greatest mathematical minds. In Robert's article he described how Kepler was able to fit an elliptical orbit to Tycho's observations of Mars.

In the case of Piazzi's observations, the circumstances were a little different; Piazzi's measurements of Ceres's positions in the sky were more accurate than Tycho's positions for Mars, because Piazzi had a telescope. The form of the orbit was (correctly) assumed to be elliptical, a fact not known a priori to Kepler. However, Kepler had access to observations all around the orbit of Mars, whereas Piazzi's observations were from just a small segment of Ceres's orbit.

The greatest mathematician of the nineteenth century, Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855), rose to the challenge. To estimate the parameters of Ceres's orbit he developed a new mathematical technique to find which orbit fitted the observations best. This technique is called "least-squares fitting" and is now a routine workhorse of numeric analysis. I use least-square fitting all the time in my day job in mathematical modelling for engineering, and I'm sure many readers of this article use it too.

Other mathematicians, notably Adrian-Marie Legendre in France, were developing similar techniques, and indeed Legendre and Gauss (who was not always quick to publish his work) had a dispute over who first developed the idea of least-squares. What is beyond dispute is that it was Gauss who used the technique, two hundred and twenty-two years ago, to solve the most pressing astronomical problem of the day.

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Antipodean Historical Astronomy Notes

Wayne Orchiston

1) Minor Planets named after BAA members (listed in the previous Section NL).

May I add that I have a minor planet named after me! It is number 48471, Orchiston.

2) The University of Science and Technology of China Lectures

Earlier this year the USTC, as the current owner of the Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage (JAHH), introduced a twice-monthly international series of lectures in History of Astronomy. These two-hour free-of-charge Zoom lectures, are hosted by the JAHH Co-Editors, Profs Wayne Orchiston and Shi Yunli, and are on the first and third Saturdays of each month.

To date there has been a wide range of topics presented, by speakers from Australia, China, the Netherlands, Sweden and Thailand. If you would like to receive a poster about each lecture and the associated Zoom link, send a covering email message, including your name and email address, to the JAHH Editorial Assistant, Ms Ziwei Tao (ziweitao@ustc.edu.cn).

3) Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand Honorary Member

At the June 2023 Annual Conference of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand I was elected an Honorary Member of the society. This was a wonderful and unexpected honour for me, as these memberships are reserved for very senior international astronomers, but with close links to New Zealand. Following Brian Warner's recent death, there are only three of us, the best-known one to BAA members being Prof Gerry Gilmore at Cambridge, Head of the GAIA collaboration. Apart from astrophysics, Gerry is also actively involved in historical research, is a member of the RASNZ's Historical Section, and is the thematic editor for Optical Astronomy of Springer's Third Edition of the Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers (meanwhile, I serve as the thematic editor for Radio Astronomy).

4) The Historical Section of the RASNZ

Since surveyor-astronomer Glen Rowe and I formed the Historical Section of the RASNZ back in November 2022 it has gone from strength-to-strength. We now have more than 50 members, working on a wide range of collaborative research projects involving both amateur and professional astronomy in New Zealand. Section members presented a variety of oral papers and displayed eight posters at the June Annual Conference of the Society (some of you may recall that three of these colourful posters also were on display at your 2023 May BAA Section meeting, along with two of my posters that originally were prepared for earlier RASNZ Conferences). In addition, immediately following the Auckland Conference the Historical Section ran a highly successful half-day Workshop on New Zealand Astronomical History.

Apart from Prof Gerry Gilmore, RASNZ Historical Section members include well-known BAA members Mike Frost and Dr Richard McKim, as well as London-based Mary Harris, a daughter of the world's first female radio astronomer Dr Elizabeth Alexander (who carried out pioneering observations of the Sun from New Zealand during WWII). Members of

the Section need not be members of the RASNZ, and there are no Section joining or annual fees. If you are interested in joining the Section please email me (wayne.orchiston@gmail.com).

5) The Le Roy E. Doggett Prize for Historical Astronomy

Recently I was thrilled to learnt that I will be awarded the 2024 Le Roy Doggett Prize by the Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society. This is presented every two years to "... individuals who have significantly influenced the field of history of astronomy by a career-long effort." What a wonderful honour, and I will now join the likes of Profs Richard Stephenson and the late Michael Hoskin as one of the few non-Americans who will have been awarded this prestigious Prize since its inauguration in 1998.

Darunee Lingling and I hope to attend the AAS Winter Meeting in New Orleans in January 2024 where I will receive the Prize in person and present a paper on my research.

[Congratulations! – Mike Frost]

6) The Springer Festschrift

2023 has been quite eventful year for me, to say the least, with Springer producing the book Essays in Astronomical History and Heritage: A Tribute to Wayne Orchiston on His 80th Birthday. This volume was edited by two of my former history of astronomy PhD students, the American Prof Steve Gullberg (University of Oklahoma) and the Australian Dr Peter Robertson (University of Melbourne).

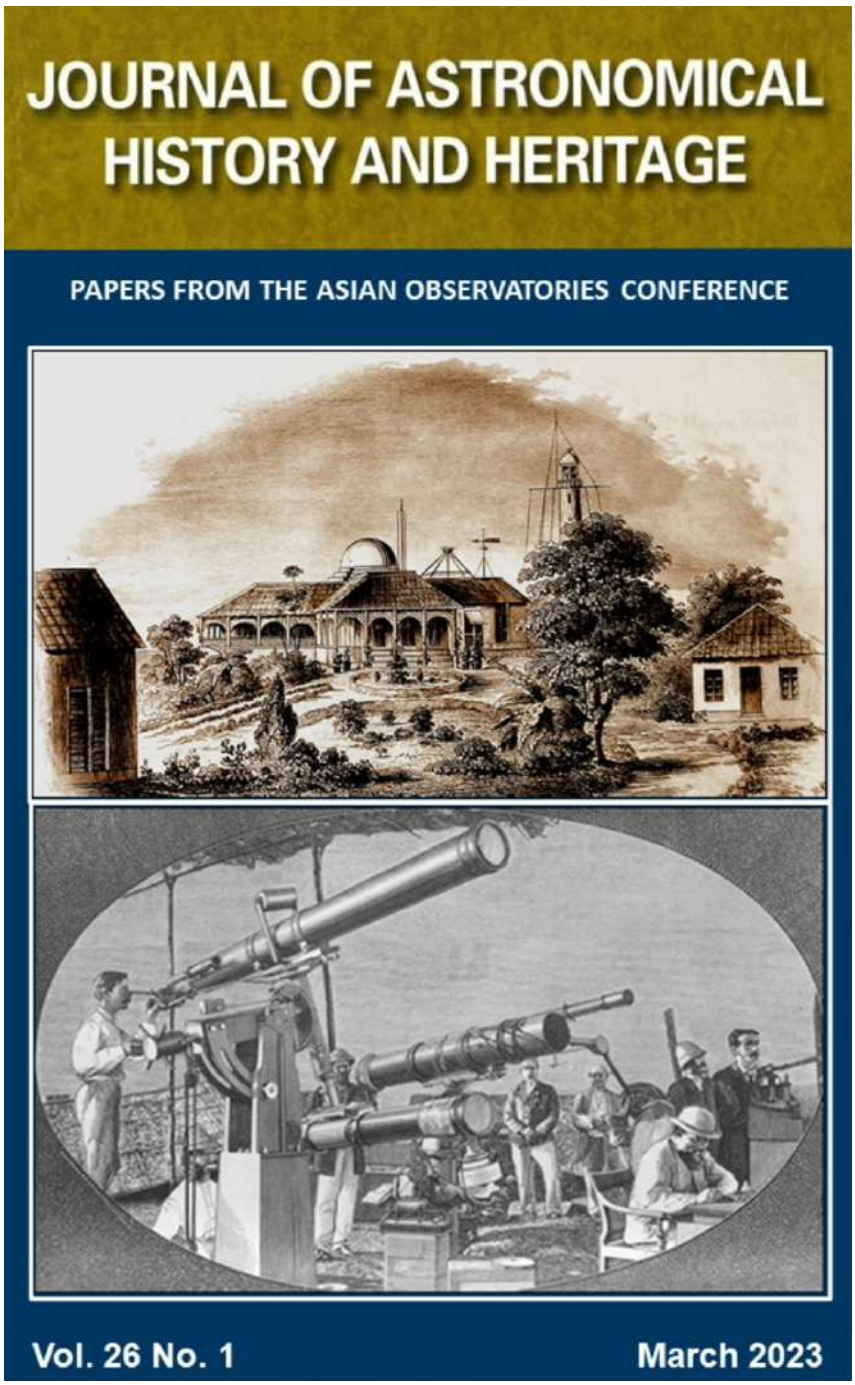
Among the 35-plus authors of papers in this tome are Alan Batten, Clifford Cunningham, Richard de Grijs, David de Vorkin, Stephen J. Dick, Ian Glass, James Lequeux, Ken Kellermann, Leslie Morrison, Sara Schechner, William Sheehan, Richard Stephenson, Woodruff T. Sullivan III, Virginia Trimble, Richard Wielebinski, and the late Jay Pasachoff and William Tobin. Most, if not all, of these names will be familiar to BAA Historical Section members.

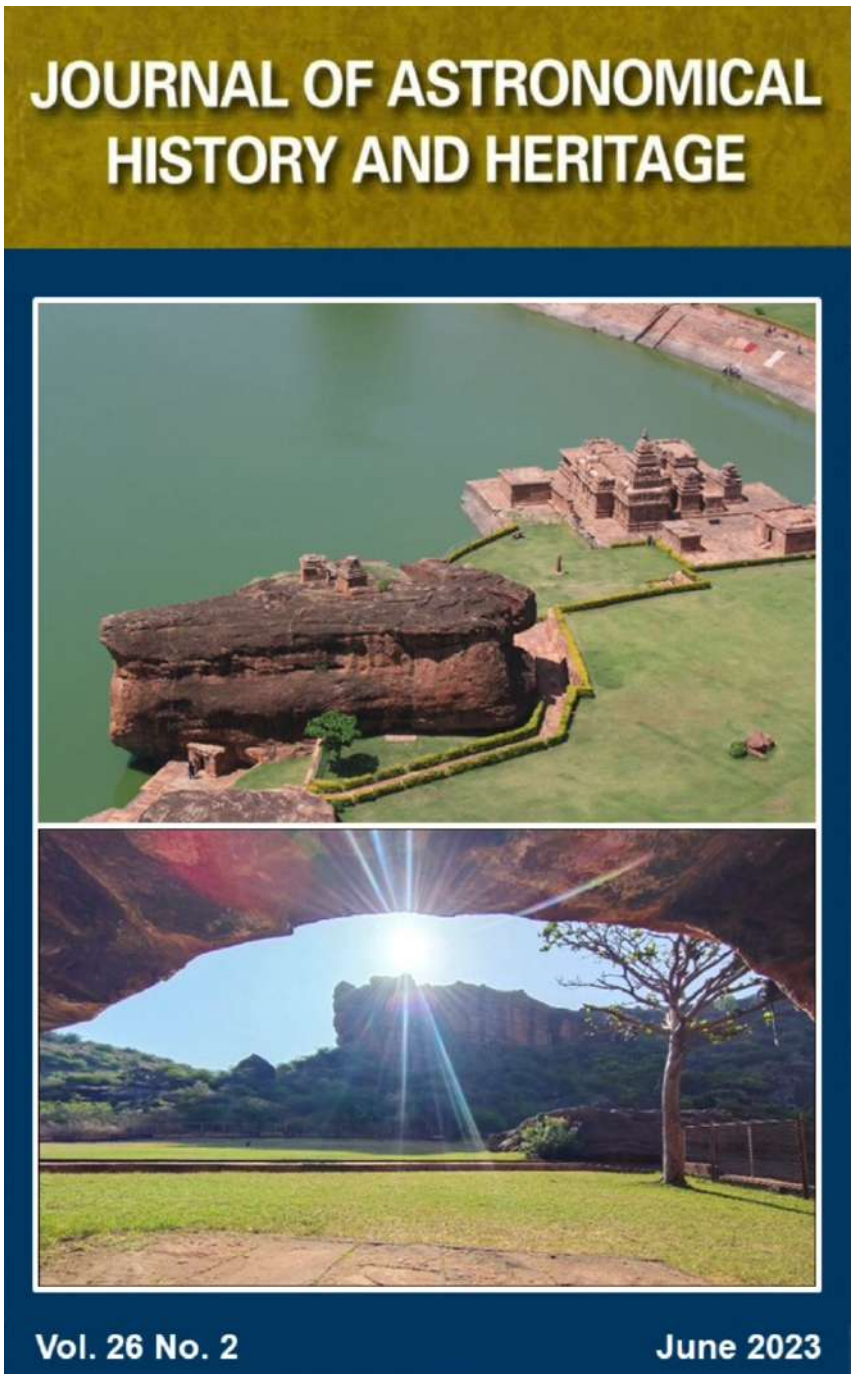
The international launch of the Festschrift took place during the 2023 Annual Conference of the RASNZ in Auckland.

7) 2023 Issues of the Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage

The March and June issues of JAHH are available for download from the journal's web site (jahh.ustc.edu.cn) and from the ADS and Rizel Technological University web sites.

For the main part, the March issue features papers from the February 2020 Manila (Philippines) conference on 'Asian Observatories', while the June issue is a special number designed (along with the Springer Festschrift) to celebrate my 80th Birthday. But in the case of the JAHH, the authors were those who were not invited to contribute to the Festschrift as at the time they were intended as participants in a WayneFest Conference that was planned for Indonesia in 2023 (along with the associated proceedings). It was only when funding for WayneFest disappeared in late 2022 that the idea of the special June issue of JAHH emerged. Below are the covers of both issues of the JAHH.


JOURNAL OF ASTRONOMICAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE
PAPERS FROM THE ASIAN OBSERVATORIES CONFERENCE
Vol. 26 No. 1
March 2023



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Seen in Reading
Bill Barton

‘The Real Basil Brown: From Rickinghall to Sutton Hoo and back’, Sarah E Doig. Quatrefoil Press, £10:00, A5, 156 pages, ISBN: 9780993170652, a new biography of an amateur astronomer.

Dates for your diary

Gresham College, Wednesday October 18 2023, ‘Astronomy and the Forging of Mathematical Communities’ https://www.gresham.ac.uk/whats-on/bshm-2024

SHA Autumn Conference & AGM, Saturday October 21 2023, 9:30am to 5:00pm, Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St., Birmingham. Booking essential, email meetings@shastro.org.uk to attend.

Historical Section Webinar, Wednesday November 22 2023, 8:00 pm UT, ‘The Australian eclipses of 1857 and 1871: Advances in Technology’, Prof. Nick Lomb, University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

RAS Meeting, Friday December 8 2023, 4:00pm to 6:00pm, ‘The making of an Observatory: the early years of the Cambridge Observatory’, Dr Daniel Belteki. Hybrid Meeting at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London and online.