

# *IoA Library Bulletin*

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## **An Unexpected Journey**

IoA librarian Mark Hurn found himself going on an unexpected journey to Selsey in Sussex at the end of January. Selsey is a small town on the South coast of England and the home for many years of Sir Patrick Moore, perhaps Britain's most famous amateur astronomer and a noted eccentric. Sir Patrick died in December last year and Mark had been asked to advise his executors on his collection of books.

Just getting to Selsey was an adventure with massive traffic jams on the M25 and torrential rain, not to mention the serious flooding of the road into Selsey itself.

On arriving at Sir Patrick's former home, a rambling, thatched house called 'Farthings', Mark met with executors, who include Brian May, guitarist from the rock group Queen (who also has a Ph.D in astrophysics). There wasn't much time that evening to start on the books, so Mark retired to the local pub 'The Seal' where he had a room for the night.



Mark Hurn pictured with Patrick Moore at Farthings in 2006

The real work started early the next day, with a room-by-room survey of the books. Mark found books in

twelve rooms (including the bathroom!) and estimated there were about 14,500 volumes in total.

As might be expected, the majority of the books were on astronomy, but there were books representing other interests of Sir Patrick, such as cricket, cats, music and humour.

The most fascinating things were the books made by Patrick himself. As a young man he would borrow a book, then type out the entire contents and bind it himself. This would provide him with a copy and at the same time commit the contents to his memory. He was entirely self-taught, never attending school or university. His interest in astronomy had begun as a child and his observing log-books go back to 1934. Many of the log-books contain detailed sketches of the Moon, planets and comets.

Every room at 'Farthings' is crammed with astronomical paraphernalia and space memorabilia. The walls are decorated with the strange paintings of aliens which Patrick's mother painted. The most famous room must be the book-lined Study, where Patrick's old typewriter now stands silent, and where in later years he would broadcast his long-running television programme "The Sky at Night".

In the garden there are a couple of old telescopes in small observatories and in the garage Patrick's old Ford Prefect which he called 'The Ark'.

Mark has submitted a report with some recommendations for the books, but a lot depends on the future of 'Farthings' itself, will it become a museum, a

study centre for astronomy, or return to being a private house?



Books in the Study at Farthings 2013

### **Minor Planet Hingley**

Minor Planet 48447 has been named “Hingley”, after Peter Hingley (1951-2012) librarian of the RAS who died last year.

IoA Library has a group on **Facebook**:  
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/221028344616052/>

### **New Books**

Suggestions for new books are always welcome. Each month a list of new books is placed on the IoA Library website. The books themselves are placed on display in the Hoyle building library area. There is a clipboard underneath the display so you can reserve books of your choice.

### **LibrarySearch+**

You may have used LibrarySearch which is a quick way of searching for a book across all the Cambridge libraries, but there is now an even more powerful search engine -

**LibrarySearch+** which enables searching of journals, newspapers, archives and many other resources. It is in a pilot version at the moment, but you can try it out at:

<http://search.lib.cam.ac.uk//>

A late-Victorian technology is making a comeback in the Library in the form of the stereo-graphoscope! A device which might be found in the study of a Jules Verne or H.G. Wells hero has come to the Library from the estate of former librarian Dr David Dewhirst.

The stereo-graphoscope allows for the comfortable viewing of stereo photographs. We now have two viewers, the earliest is a table-top Rowsell type, circa 1864-70, the other a hand held type.

Stereo photographs were introduced to the public by astronomer Charles Piazzi Smyth (1819-1900), who took a number of stereographs on his visit to Tenerife in 1856. He illustrated his book on the expedition with them, a book which championed the use of mountain-top observatories (well ahead of his time).

As well as the book: “Teneriffe : an astronomer's experiment, or, specialities of a residence above the clouds” by C. Piazzi Smyth. Published: London : Lovell Reeve, 1858 we also have about 60 stereographs for the Rowell type viewer, including The Moon and views of the Lick Observatory.

The stereo-graphoscope has already been deployed twice with visiting groups to the Library.

### **Diary Date**

IoA Open Afternoon Saturday 23  
March 2013

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