

Reflecting the candle: 124 years of the *Journal* of the BAA

Hazel McGee

The 2014 Presidential Address, delivered on 2014 October 29 at Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1.

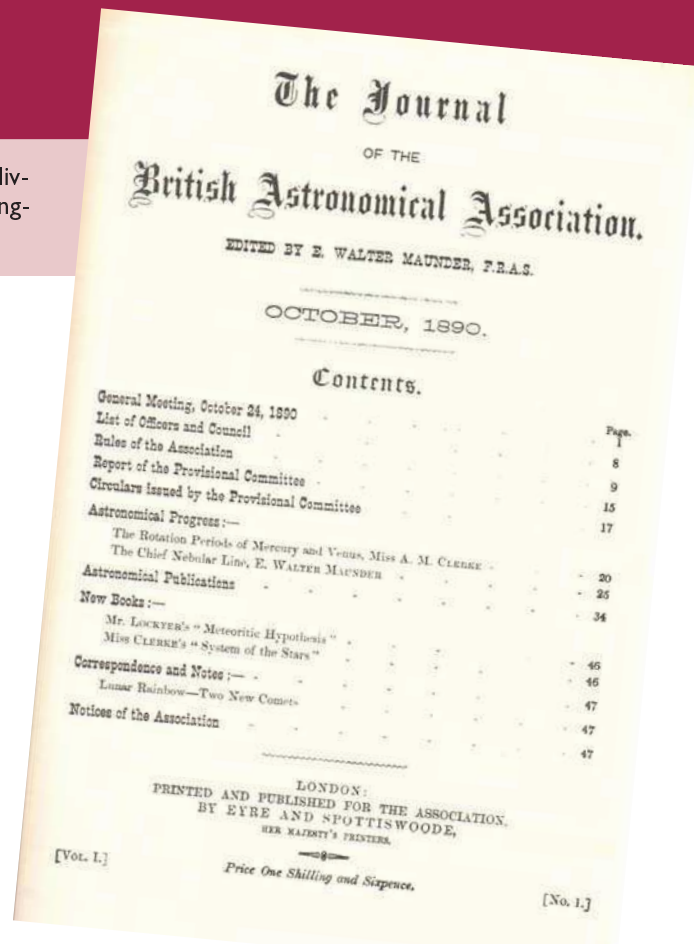
As most of you know, I have edited the *Journal* of the BAA for more than 20 years, so today I am going to tell you a bit more about it, who was there before me, and how it has changed over time.

Figure 1 (right) shows the cover of the first *Journal*, dated 1890 October, the date of the founding of the BAA. This is a facsimile reprint that was printed in 1990 for the Association's Centenary, and is still available for purchase from the BAA website. The first issue was just over half the size of the current *Journal*; a bit taller than A5, and a tad narrower. And though 1890 October is the date on the cover, it was actually published on November 26 of that year, so it could contain a report of the October meeting.

The Association held nine monthly meetings per year, with a summer break from July to September, and each issue of the *Journal* began with a detailed report of the meeting held in the cover month. A separate issue was devoted to the Report of Council and the Accounts, so in a normal year there would be ten issues.

Figure 3 is a remarkable picture from our archives, a drawing of one of the first BAA meetings. Although it is undated, by referring to the *Journal* we can tell that it is the meeting of 1893 April 26, when David Gill visited from South Africa. He is giving a talk on the solar parallax. In the meeting report, we read that Dr Gill regretted that due to a misunderstanding he had brought no 'lantern slides', so he has to use a chalkboard to illustrate his talk – and some of the photographs from the South African Observatory that he brought to show to the members, as a substitute for slides, can be seen at the bottom of the drawing.

Reports of meetings in those days were extremely detailed. Talks and members' questions and comments were reproduced verbatim – later there is a reference in the Accounts to the cost of a professional shorthand recorder. Meetings were at the centre of the BAA's activities, and it is no wonder the arrival of the *Journal* with its meet-



ing reports was keenly awaited by members living far from London. Today of course we can hear the talks and see the slides on the Internet, serving very much the same purpose.

So here we are at this meeting 120 years ago, which really comes alive for us – don't you love that hat at the top? I'm glad I am not sitting behind her. The President of the day, Dr A. M. W. Downing, is looking very Presidential... and below him on the left are two people we will hear a lot more about as we discover more of the story of the BAA *Journal*.

Edward Walter Maunder (1851–1928), usually regarded quite rightly as the founder of the Association, was also the first Editor of its *Journal*, which shows the importance he placed on this means of communication among the members. And although she is not named on the drawing, there is no doubt that the lady next to Maunder is his colleague at the Royal Greenwich Observatory, Annie Scott Dill Russell (1868–1947), already well known in her own right as a writer and populariser of astronomy. A year later Walter Maunder was elected President, and Annie Russell took over as Editor. The following year they were married, although Walter was almost 18 years Annie's senior.

Walter Maunder formally resumed the Editorship in 1897 at the end of his Presidency, though I think we can imagine that it had always really been a joint effort between him and Annie. In 1900 however, the couple began to prepare for an expedition to Mauritius to observe the total solar eclipse of 1901 May 17. They would be away from home for several months, and Walter Maunder therefore resigned as Editor with the final number of Volume 10 of the *Journal*.

His successor was Frederick William Levander (1839–1916), whose

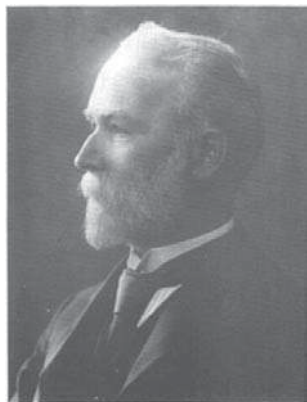


Figure 2. Edward Walter & Annie Scott Dill Maunder, first and second Editors of the BAA *Journal*.



Figure 3. The BAA meeting of 1893 April 26, held at Barnard's Inn Hall, Holborn, London. (from the BAA archives.)

name as Editor first appears on volume 11, no.1. Levander was a former schoolmaster who was already the Librarian of the Association. In 1906 he too was elected President, but unlike Maunder, did not give up the Editorship during that time, although he did find someone else to take over as Librarian. Frederick Levander served as Editor for 16 years, including the difficult time of the start of the first World War, and died suddenly on 1916 Dec 20 at the age of 77.

Following Levander's death the next two issues, nos. 3 and 4 of volume 27, were put together by Walter Maunder, following which

the Council officially appointed Mrs Annie Scott Dill Maunder as Editor of the *Journal* and *Memoirs*.

I think it is probably fair to say that Annie would have had little trouble recognising the *Journal* she took over from Frederick Levander as being remarkably similar to the publication she had edited with her husband over 16 years before. The first 9 or 10 pages were devoted to a verbatim report of the latest monthly meeting of the Association, followed by brief reports from the Branches in Scot-

land or Australia, and short reports from one or two of the observing Sections. Members communicated Papers describing their own observations and those of others, and instruments they had constructed. These were followed by an often quite lengthy set of correspondence, book reviews and perhaps an obituary or two, and several pages of short notes on recent developments in professional astronomy, gleaned from the pages of journals such as *Monthly Notices* and *Astronomische Nachrichten*.

The detailed reports of the Sections, containing members' observations formally analysed and reported by the Section Directors, were not published in the *Journal* at that time, primarily for space and cost reasons – instead Directors would prepare *Memoirs*, quite substantial volumes in their own right, which were printed and sold separately. Efforts were made to obtain sponsorship from wealthy individuals or from professional associations to cover the cost of publishing these, and occasional comments in the annual Reports of the Council indicate that the success of these efforts was somewhat variable. *Memoirs* were published regularly until after the Second World War, but with one or two exceptions, since that time the major reports of the Sections have appeared in the *Journal*.

One notable feature of the early *Journals*, as John Chuter, one of our Archivists, recently remarked, is how few illustrations they contain, certainly by modern standards. This was of course an inevitable result of the printing technology in use at the time. Until at least the middle of the 20th century the *Journal* would have been printed by hot-lead letterpress, a process not greatly changed since the time of Gutenberg.



Figure 4. Frederick William Levander, Editor from 1900 to 1916.



Figure 5. A small letterpress printroom, around the start of the 20th century.

The Editor would collect together the material received, no doubt vigorously applying her red pencil. She would physically cut or retype much of it, mark it up for the typesetter, and send it all to the printers in a big fat scruffy folder, probably tied with the proverbial red tape. The typesetter would set it in lead type, one letter at a time, in a long, continuous strip from page 1 to page 48, 56 or 64, and print out the ‘galley proofs’ on long strips of paper that were then sent back to the Editor for checking.

She would mark the errors and return the proofs to the typesetter, who made the corrections, hopefully returning an adequately corrected set of galleys this time. The Editor then cut up the corrected galleys and pasted them onto sheets of card or thick paper, indicating the page breaks and the sequence of the articles, and back they went to the printers again. At last she would receive and check a set of hopefully final proofs, and she could tell the printers the issue was ready to print. By which time, of course, she already had most of the material for the next issue, and was busy typing, cutting and checking...

Illustrations were expensive and difficult to handle, particularly photographs, which must be printed as ‘plates’ on shiny coated

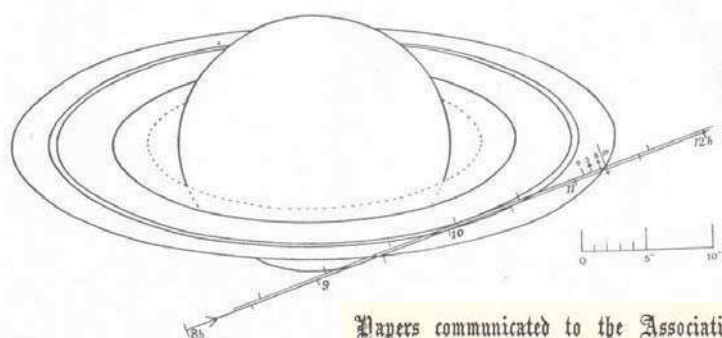


Figure 6. A 7th magnitude star occulted by Saturn's A-ring, from *Journal* 27(7), 1917 May.

paper, and bound into the *Journal* as separate pages from the main sheets. So-called ‘blocks’ were made for line drawings which were fitted into the text as required, but apart from advertisements which tended to be repeated every month, there were still remarkably few illustrations by modern standards.

Here is a flavour of the kind of short reports from members that appeared in the *Journal* of Annie Maunder's time. Naval Instructor M. A. AINSLIE, R.N., and Mr J. KNIGHT, separately and serendipitously, happened to note through their telescopes the rings of Saturn passing in front of a 7th magnitude star, and both reported the observation in detail, confirming the other's report. The reports and drawing appear in *Journal* 27 no.7, dated 1917 May, and at the meeting at which the paper was read, Mr J. C. Prior said he thought this was one of the most interesting planetary observations of the last 30 or 40 years. He had looked up all the records and was unable to find that any observer previously had seen ring A pass over a star. There was a record of a star having been seen between the rings and the ball but not passing behind the rings, and the event gave rise to much speculation and discussion at the meeting on the nature and possible structure of the rings of Saturn.

Another most interesting paper appeared in *Journal* 32, no.4, (1922 January), entitled ‘The Prolonged Sunspot Minima, 1645–1715’. In this Walter Maunder drew attention to the almost complete lack of sunspots observed during that period. Maunder highlighted two earlier papers on the subject by another solar observer, Prof F. W. Spörer, and in drawing attention to these and summarising their contents, aimed to make sure that the importance of the phenomenon was not overlooked again.

This was of course the episode that became known as the Maunder Minimum, and has come back to prominence recently with the low solar activity in the current cycle.

Annie Maunder retired as Editor in 1930 after 13 years, and was replaced by Peter Doig, a former shipbuilding draughtsman who had developed a reputation within the BAA as a stellar astronomer. In 1936 with a change of printer the cover finally changed from the pattern set in 1890, a list of the contents of the issue with headings set in a Gothic typestyle that was hugely outdated even then, to a plain card cover that remained until the even more radical change to the A4 format in 1981.



Figure 7. Peter Doig, Editor 1930–1937 & 1948–1952

The internal style and content of the *Journal* however remained mostly unchanged, though the print quality improved with advances in technology, and Doig made the layout clearer. Highlights of the period between the wars included Will Hay's observation of a white spot on Saturn on 1933 August 3, which formed the frontispiece of the 1934 March *Journal*, and the discovery of Nova Herculis in 1934 December by J. P. M. Prentice, while engaged in a Geminid meteor watch.

Peter Doig resigned as Editor in 1937 October, due to ‘pressure of other work’, and was followed first by R. M. Fry, and then by F. J. Sellers.

Frank Sellers, a retired engineer and businessman, was officially described as ‘Honorary Acting Editor during the

Editors of the BAA Journal

	Editorship	Notes
Edward Walter Maunder (1851–1928)	1890–1894	Resigned when elected President 1894 Oct.
Annie Scott Dill Russell (1868–1947)	1894–1896	Married EWM, 1895 Dec 28
E. W. Maunder	1896–1900	Resigned on departure on Eclipse expedition, 1900 October
Frederick Wm Levander (1839–1916)	1900–1916	President 1906–1908. Died in office, 1916 Dec 20
Annie S. D. Maunder	1917–1930	
Peter Doig (1882–1952)	1930–1937	
R. M. Fry (1896–1980)	1937–1946	
Francis John Sellers (1875–1959) (Acting)	1941–1946	Sellers assumed duties in Fry's absence due to war work
J. L. Haughton (1884–1973)	1946–1948	
Peter Doig	1948–1952	Died in office, 1952 Oct 13
Neville James Goodman (1917–2001)	1952–1960	President 1972–1974
D. G. Hinds	1960–1963	
Frank Wilsenham Hyde (1909–1984)	1963–1965	
Colin Alistair Ronan (1920–1995)	1965–1985	President 1989–1991
Nigel Henbest (1951–)	1985–1987	
Jacqueline Mitton (1948–)	1987–1993	
Hazel McGee (1943–)	1994–	

emergency period since 1941 April'. He had taken over Fry's duties when the latter was called away to war work, and according to his obituary 'it is safe to say it is doubtful if [the *Journal*] would have survived had Sellers not stepped into the breach and kept it going.'

The period during and after the Second World War was inevitably a troubled and difficult time, with continual problems of shortage of paper and other materials, and of course the disruption to ordinary life caused by the bombing and by the absence of so many members in the forces. Sellers helped to produce the *Journal* until the end of the war, and also served as President from 1940 to 1942.

The Editorship changed hands six or seven times during and after the War, including returning for 4 years to Peter Doig, who died in office in 1952. At the start of 1965, mainly for reasons of cost, Council decided that the *Journal* should in future be published bi-monthly, that is six times per year, in place of the previous eight or ten issues. The first issue of each volume was that published in December, and still contained a detailed report of the AGM of the previous session.

The then Editor was the radio astronomer F. W. Hyde, but Hyde resigned with the final issue of 1965, and was replaced by the historian and author Colin Ronan.

Colin brought to our *Journal* a stability and strength which was



Figure 8. Frank Sellers, Editor 1941–1946 (acting).

Journal of the British Astronomical Association	
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Figure 9. The first A4-size cover of the *Journal*, 1981 December.

badly needed. In those days working with printers was just as time-consuming and not very different from how it had been in Annie Maunder's time: first the copy must be clean typed and printed out in double spacing, hopefully by the contributor but often by the Editor himself – using a typewriter of course, none of your word-processors with their easy correction of errors. Then each sheet was marked with obscure codes to tell the printer how to set it: underlining for italics, wavy underlines for bold type, each different size and style of typeface marked and named. Eventually all the material was ready and sent off to the typesetter, who typed it all again for the press into a fiendish machine called a Linotype. A week or so later back came the first proofs for check-

ing – you used another set of obscure codes to correct the errors, of which inevitably there were many, and so on and so forth. The editorial process was still the same when I took over 28 years later! – but happily only for one issue...

Back in 1966 the format and style of the *Journal* remained at roughly half A4 size, until finally in 1981 the printers advised Council that their prices would have to increase by almost a third unless the page size was changed to A4, and the print process allowed to progress from letterpress to offset litho. Figure 9 shows the first cover of the *Journal* in the A4 format, that of 1981 December.

Not only was this substantially cheaper, the larger page size allowed for a much more flexible layout, and the new offset litho

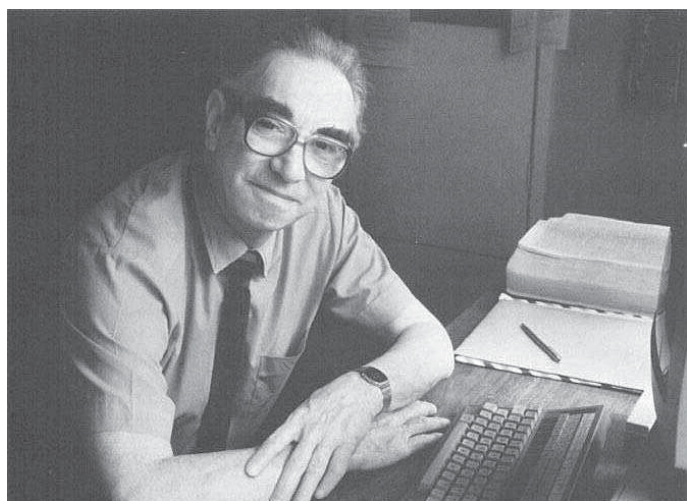


Figure 10. Colin A. Ronan, Editor 1965–1985.

process enabled many more illustrations to be used. Colin Ronan quickly took advantage of this and even in the first few issues of the A4 size we see many more illustrations – for example, Derek Howse's liberally illustrated 1981 Presidential Address on 'Navigation and Astronomy' in the 1982 February issue.

The first A4-sized volume still had covers of off-white, non-coated card and showed only the contents of the issue, but the first issue of volume 93 introduced a glossy picture cover on a coated paper, a pattern which still remains today, although the use of colour had to await more technical advances and cost reductions.

Colin Ronan edited the *Journal* for 20 years from 1965 to 1985, and for the first issue of 1986 handed over to Nigel Henbest. For the Christmas issue that year Nigel brought in another new development – the *Journal*'s very first cover in colour, a set of photographs by Martin Mobberley that were at last able to do full justice to the originals, in this case photos of the lunar eclipse of 1986 October 17, taken at the prime focus of his 350mm f/5 reflector. And according to the caption they were taken on Kodacolor Gold 100 film... Remember Kodak? Remember film?

It would still be a while before the *Journal* could fully catch up with the best of the photographic work that our members were now producing, but at least a colour image on the cover was a good start.

Nigel's time as Editor was relatively short, and in 1987 June he told his readers that he would be relinquishing the editorship of the *Journal* because of pressure of other commitments. His successor was another author and populariser of astronomy, Dr Jacqueline Mitton.

Jacqueline edited the *Journal* for six years, including the time of the Centenary celebrations of the BAA in 1990. She introduced many improvements, including a more consistent and logical layout of papers and non-

refereed articles, which had tended in the past to be scattered rather randomly through each issue. Familiar sections like 'Notes and News', 'BAA Update' and 'Observers' Forum' found their place, and also, without any fanfare or note in the text that I could find, Jacqueline quietly aligned the volume numbers with the calendar year, so volume 98 in 1988 had seven issues, including that of 1988 December, and issue 1 of volume 99 appeared in 1989 February. Librarians and archivists must have been very grateful to Jacqueline for this!

The Centenary year saw special meetings of the BAA held all over the country, including Dublin, Armagh, Liverpool and Dundee, and a huge centenary gathering at the Commonwealth Institute in London. The post office issued a set of stamps which jointly commemorated our centenary and the 200th anniversary of Armagh Observatory. The stamps appeared in colour on the back cover of the *Journal* in 1990 October. And looking now through the *Journals* of the time I was also struck by the photos of Mars on the cover of 1991 February. Still black and white of course, but remarkable photos for the day. They were taken by Terry Platt in 1990 November and December, and were among the earliest images in the *Journal* taken by an amateur using that new-fangled device called a CCD camera. Professional observatories had used the so-called 'Charge-Coupled Device' for several years, but they were expensive and cumbersome, and few people could have imagined the way they would invade and dominate the amateur imaging field in the next few years.

The final *Journal* of 1993 had a cover showing the 'string of pearls' of comet Shoemaker–Levy 9 as it orbited Jupiter, prior to colliding with the planet in 1994 July. The inset top left shows David Levy with Carolyn and Eugene Shoemaker, photographed by Jacqueline Mitton earlier in 1993 while visiting the USA.

I took over from Jacqueline with the first issue of 1994, and I still remember the superb, fully-illustrated 15-page paper by Martin Mobberley on Comet Swift–Tuttle in my first *Journal*, and the trepidation with which I approached it. Text was then still typeset at the printers, and images scanned by them to make blocks to fit into the pages in the spaces I indicated on my pasted-up galleys. With proofs going back and forth by post it's no wonder that each *Journal* took several weeks to see through the press, and one of my first ambitions on taking over was to see if it was possible to change all this.

Which of course the printers were delighted to do, and I was soon sending them MS Word files, first on floppy disks and then by e-mail, and I quickly learned to use a desktop publishing program to design the layout instead of having to physically cut and paste paper galley strips.

With the August issue of 1994 we reached another milestone – a short note by the President of the day, Dr Richard McKim, drew attention to the use of colour printing on some pages, and said that 'Council recently voted in principle to use colour printing twice per year...'



Figure 12. Dr Jacqueline Mitton, Editor 1987–1993



Figure 11. The first *Journal* colour cover, 1986 December.

This was not a trivial decision, as printing in colour was substantially more expensive than black and white, however Council were happy to support it for the benefits it would bring for our imagers and the *Journal*. The page placings available for colour were restricted however – a nightmare from the Editor's point of view! – and it would be many years before technical advances in the printing process made it financially possible to print colour on every page of every issue.

So what about the high points of these years astronomically? Inevitably we remember the dramatic events... Comet Shoemaker–Levy 9 crashing into Jupiter, leaving huge black scars clearly visible in the smallest telescope; Comet C/1996 B2 (Hyakutake), seen in Figure 14 rising over the trees on Tenerife in the Canary Islands, in a photo by Martin Mobberley, Glyn Marsh & Nick James on the night of its closest approach to Earth, when they commented that even with the naked eye the tail stretched right across the sky – a great comet indeed, and one that really shows how comets acquired their frightening mystique in earlier times.

And of course 1999 August 11, the Cornish eclipse, when the BAA took over Truro School to view the event on what must surely have been the most disappointing day in the Association's history (it rained).



Comet Hyakutake rising over foreground trees on the night of closest approach, 1996 March 24/25, photographed from 1800m on Mt. Teide, Tenerife, Spain. A five minute exposure on hypered TP2415 film. The tail shows at least two disconnection events. The bright star above the tail is Alkaid, the last star in the handle of the Plough; galaxy M101 can be seen about half-way between this star and the edge of the frame. 23.58–24.03 UT, 55mm lens at f/2; print scale 6.8mm = 1 degree; N. D. James, M. P. Mobberley & G. Marsh.

Figure 14. A 'naked-eye' view of Comet Hyakutake over Tenerife, from the 1996 June *Journal*.

So now we have come full circle – from hot-lead typesetting and black and white letterpress printing, right up to date with all the typesetting and layout done on my home computer, PDFs uploaded directly to the printers, and at last we can faithfully reproduce the fully coloured world of modern astronomy.

But before I conclude, I must mention the other important people who make the *Journal* possible. First of all, our Papers Secretary, who unlike the Editor is an elected Officer of the Association. He is responsible for receiving the scientific papers from contributors, arranging referees, and making recommendations to Council on whether or not the papers should be accepted. This job has been done for 17 years by Nick James, who as you know is stepping down this year, and I cannot thank him enough for the strong and steadfast support he has given me throughout my Editorship.

Then those referees themselves, often busy professional scientists, who are ready to review and critique the papers we send them – without their help the high reputation that the *Journal* enjoys in the astronomical world would be impossible to maintain.

And thanks are due also to our Section Directors, who help members prepare their work for publication, and create the detailed reports and analysis of the results of their Section's work.

But above all, I must thank you yourselves, the members of the BAA – all our observers and our writers, everyone who sends their observations to the Sections or prepares a paper, a report or even just a letter for the *Journal*. You and your contributions are what keeps the *Journal* and the Association going, and without you there would be nothing.

We have come a long way since Walter and Annie Maunder started the *Journal* to distribute reports of the meetings and activities of the BAA to its members, and to provide a place for those members to publish their observations and their results. I like to think however, that if they visited us now, they would still recognise the BAA: its observers, its science and its fellowship, and they would still know and appreciate the *Journal* which supports and serves the Association and its members in the way it has always done.

'There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it.' (Edith Wharton, 1902).

The *Journal* has been spreading the light of the BAA and its members' work for over 124 years – long may it continue.

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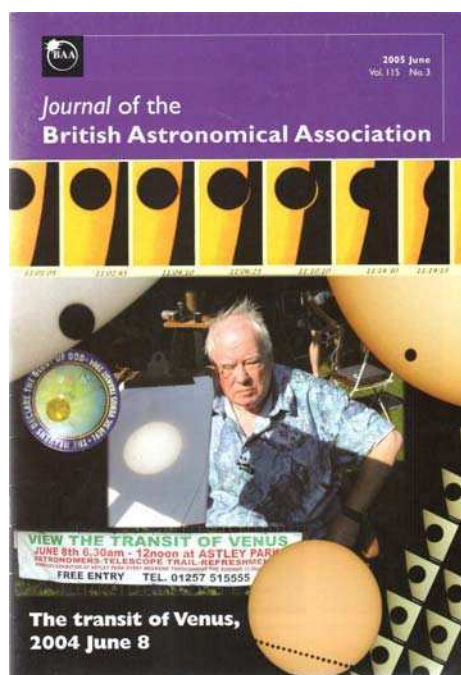


Figure 13. The cover of the special issue of 2005 June, celebrating the Transit of Venus in 2004.

cover and the inside pages to bring a fresher more modern look to the publication, and you can still see the effects of this today. But then suddenly in 2009 the UPS closed down, and as part of negotiating a good price with a new printer I was able to arrange full-colour printing throughout the *Journal* for the first time, in exchange for doing all my processing and proofing online, which suited me just fine.