

# E. W. Maunder and the formation of The British Astronomical Association

Richard McKim

On 1890 July 18 W. H. S. Monck wrote a letter to the editor of the *English Mechanic and World of Science*. I quote his letter in full:

## An Amateur Astronomers' Association

[31332.]—Perhaps you will allow me to advocate through your columns the foundation of an Amateur Astronomer's Association in London. That the Royal Astronomical Society does not supply all that is needed is, I think, evident. Its subscription is too high, and many of its papers too technical for the amateur astronomers, who now form a pretty numerous body throughout the United Kingdom, while ladies (many of whom take an interest in the science, and have contributed to its progress) are practically, if not theoretically, excluded from the Fellowship of the Royal Astronomical Society. The Liverpool Astronomical Society, for a time, promised to supply the need; and though its title was local (and to a certain extent its management was so), it opened its arms to all the world, and conferred its highest offices on astronomers who resided at a distance from Liverpool. Its local character, however, damaged it, and it had an opposite fault from the RAS: its subscription was too low, and all the work was consequently to be done without payment. Having fallen into pecuniary difficulties, it has adopted probably the best course open to it—namely, localisation. For some time past the non-resident members (though perhaps nominally members of the Council) have had no voice in its management, and were even kept in the dark as to the proceedings of their local colleagues; and the publication of the *Journal* having been suspended, most of the non-residents dropped off. The members of the Society are now, I believe, reduced by at least one-half, and a further reduction will probably take place after the next general meeting, when it is understood that the practical exclusion of non-residents from the management is to be rendered theoretical by selecting all the officers from the locality. The fact, however, that this society had at one time between 600 and 700 members with excellent prospects of increase (if the excellence of its management and of its journal had been maintained) is sufficient to show the wide-spread interest in the subject which exists all over the country; and there are hundreds of men and women who, I believe, would willingly subscribe half a guinea a year to a national society, with its meeting-place in the metropolis, which would supply them with a journal giving the latest astronomical discoveries (and of course appearing regularly), together with readable expositions or discussions on the leading problems of astronomy. The society would also be a means of introducing amateurs residing in different places to each other and instituting conjoint branches of research which are in some instances (for example meteors) of greater value than any single series of observations could be. The society might also be the means of disseminating some of the latest and best astronomical photographs among a wide class of readers.

I do not think such a society should be regarded as

hostile to the Royal Astronomical Society or to the Liverpool Society, to which, in its localised character, I wish success.

W. H. S. Monck  
Dublin, July 12.'

With the publication of the above letter, the pages of *English Mechanic* became littered with letters on the same subject, a few defending the local management at Liverpool, but most agreeing with Monck that a new national Society with headquarters in London was wanted. The letters included some from the Rev. W. R. Waugh and Miss Elizabeth Brown, both one-time Section Directors of the Liverpool organisation, and shortly to direct the Jupiter and Solar Sections, respectively, of the new national Society. According to the official History of the Association (*Memoirs*, 36 Part 2 (1948)): '... Miss Brown had written several times to E. W. Maunder, urging the desirability of starting a new Society, and as Maunder said afterwards, "With a gentle persistency which characterised her, she would not take "No" for an answer", and, before Monck's letter appeared, he had already discussed the idea with Downing and Hollis, his colleagues at the Greenwich Observatory, and with many others.' Other correspondents who were to become intimately involved with the BAA included Walter Goodacre, A. Stanley Williams, W. S. Franks and E. E. Markwick. Some correspondents hid their true identities, and some readers may like to try to identify 'Væ Victus' (July 25), 'A Country Vicar' and 'An old member' (August 1), and so on...

Encouraged by his colleagues, and assisted by his brother Frid Maunder and W. H. Maw, Edward Walter Maunder (1851–1928) made his first reference to the proposed new Society in the August 8 issue. Displaying great energy and skill, he quickly went about forming the new Society:

## Junior Astronomical Society

[31416.]—With reference to Mr Monck's letter (No. 31332) in your issue of July 18th, you will, perhaps, allow me to say that a society upon the lines which Mr Monck has suggested is now in process of formation, and that I shall be most pleased to receive the names of those who would like to join it. I may say that the provisional committee already numbers many of our most earnest workers, including most of those who made the Liverpool Astronomical Society what it was in the days of its activity and success. I trust next week, with your permission, to be able to publish a full list, together with our formal programme.

E. W. Maunder  
Hyde House, Ulundi Road, Blackheath, S.E.'

**A JUNIOR ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY.**

[31437].—In compliance with your courteous invitation, I send you herewith a draft of the programme of the new Astronomical Society, together with the list of the provisional committee, as at present constituted. The present being the holiday season, many of those of whose sympathy with our enterprise I feel assured are away from home, and I have not been able to communicate with them. I would again invite intending members to send their names to me, and I would thank you for the numerous accessions which have already resulted from the prominence you were good enough to bestow on my former letter. I would ask that subscriptions be *not* sent until a treasurer is appointed.

E. Walter Maunder.

Hyde House, Ulundi-road, Blackheath, S.E.

*Name.*—The British Astronomical Society.

*Membership.*—Open to all persons interested in astronomy, ladies as well as gentlemen.

*Headquarters.*—In London.

*Entrance Fee.*—Five shillings; optional for members joining before Jan. 1, 1891.

*Annual Subscription.*—Half a guinea, or members may compound by a single payment of six guineas.

*Objects.*—The association of observers, especially those with small optical means, for mutual help, and their organisation in the work of astronomical observation; the circulation of current astronomical information; and the encouragement of a popular interest in astronomy.

*Methods.*—The arrangement of members in sections or departments of observations, under experienced directors. The regular publication at short intervals of a journal, to contain Reports of the society's meetings, and of its observing sections; Papers by members, and Notes on current astronomy. The holding of meetings, not only in London, but also at provincial centres, wherever the number of members justifies it, and the members themselves desire it. The occasional delivery of lectures, practical, educational, or popular, where they are desired and can be arranged for. The establishment as soon as practicable of a Library.

*Management.*—By the usual officers and a council, of which the directors of the sections are to be *ex officio* members, the other members being elected by the society, members at a distance from London voting by post. Members of the council precluded from attending the meetings of the council are to be punctually and fully informed of the business transacted there, and in all important matters in which such a course is practicable, are to be invited to communicate their views to the secretary for submission to the council meetings. A paid secretary to be engaged for the routine work of the society.

*Provisional Committee.*—T. W. Backhouse, Rev. John Bone, D. Booth, Miss E. Brown, G. Calver, G. S. Criswick, G. T. Davis, A. M. W. Downing, M.A., P. F. Duke, T. G. Elger, Rev. T. E. Espin, B.A., W. S. Franks, W. H. St. Quintin Gage, J. E. Gore, M.R.I.A., N. E. Green, H. Grattan Guinness, D.D., H. P. Hollis, B.A., Rev. F. Howlett, M.A., W. Huggins, D.C.L., LL.D., H. Ingall, Rev. S. J. Johnson, M.A., J. Harvey Jones, S. T. K - n, F.L.S., T. Lewis, Maj. E. E. Markwick E. Walter Maunder, W. H. Maw, Arthur Mee, W. H. S. Monck, M.A., Capt. W. Noble, Jas. G. Petrie, C. L. Prince, G. M. Seabroke, K. J. Tarrant, Rev. W. R. Waugh, A. Stanley Williams.

The Editor was to 'strongly recommend' his readers to send in their names to Mr Maunder at once, and hoped the new Society would 'avoid the evils which have wrecked the Liverpool Astronomical Society'. Maunder, who worked at the Royal Greenwich Observatory, had already gained editorial experience, as editor of *The Observatory* magazine for some years in the 1880s, as well as writing for *Nature* and *Knowledge*, and so it was natural that he should become the first editor of the *BAA Journal*. Some of his private letters are to be found in the BAA Archives. These show that he lost no time in quickly putting together a 'provisional committee'. A letter from Maunder to W. H. Wesley, long-time RAS Secretary, was published in the recent reprint of the *BAA Memoir* on the History of the Association, 1890–1940. The list of the members of this committee (which included Wesley) contained many first-magnitude stars of the astronomical world of the eighteen-nineties.

The following week saw the publication of his second letter (Figure 1).

Eventually all was ready, and the BAA's first meeting was to be on 1890 October 24 in the Hall of the Society of Arts, John Street, Adelphi. Already there were 283 members, and 60 of these attended. The meeting was advertised in the daily press and elsewhere, and there was some confusion as to which Society was meeting. *The Times* of the day advertised the event as a meeting of the *Royal Astronomical Society*! (Figure 2). This confusion is understandable if one remembers that the first name of the BAA was the *British Astronomical Society*, which was only altered to *Association* at the first meeting. Some other names were suggested in the pages of the *English Mechanic*.

The rest is, of course, history. Maunder had a distinguished professional career, and made important contributions to solar astronomy. He became the head of the solar photography department at Greenwich, and will be remembered for his 'Butterfly Diagram' of the distribution of sunspots in latitude, the 'Maunder Minimum', and early work on solar-terrestrial relationships. He also directed, at various times the BAA's Mars, Star Colour and Solar Sections, the latter one for a period of 15 years, and served terms as President (1894–96), and Secretary (1914–15). Figure 3 is his Presidential Portrait. Maunder was also one-time RAS Secretary, and was instrumental in organising and participating in several eclipse expeditions both for the Greenwich Observatory and for the fledgling BAA. Miss Annie S. D. Russell (who also worked as Greenwich as a 'lady computer') became Maunder's second wife in 1895. He died in 1928 (*Journal*, 38, 229 (1928)). Mrs Maunder was to edit the *Journal* for many years in succession to her husband. She was expert in astronomical history as well as in solar work. She died in 1947 (*Journal*, 47, 238 (1947)), having been asked more than once to be President, but in the words of her Obituarist she 'refused on account of her voice, which would not carry in a large room.'

Anyone interested in the history of the BAA is urged

Figure 1. Maunder's letter in the *English Mechanic*, August 1890, setting out details of the proposed society.

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**TO-DAY.**


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Michaelmas Law Sittings begin.

r Presentation of the Lord Mayor Elect to the Lord  
f Chancellor at the House of Lords, 11.

y Royal Female School of Art, 43, Queen-square :  
Annual Exhibition of Students' Drawings (and to-  
morrow).

d Royal Astronomical Society : General Meeting at the  
rooms of the Society of Arts, 4 30.

French Exhibition, Earl's-court : Fine Art and Indus-  
trial Sections, open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. ; the  
" Wild East " and Arab Life at 3 30 and 8 p.m. ;  
, Lieutenant Dan Godfrey and band of the Grenadier  
Guards from 3 p.m.

n Racing.—Newmarket Houghton Meeting (concluding  
day).

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**BRISTOL MUSICAL FESTIVAL.**


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BRISTOL, Oct. 23.

e To-day's proceedings were limited to a performance  
t of the *Elijah*, always a favourite work with a Bristol  
n audience. The performance was as fine a rendering  
- of the choral numbers of the work as we can  
f

to purchase the historical *Memoir* reprinted recently as volume 42 Part 1 (1989), which contains many historical illustrations and portraits. Council has also decided to reissue the very first BAA *Journal* as a facsimile reprint. This contains the report of the first meeting of the Association, and set a format which was to remain unaltered for forty-five years. To celebrate the Centenary in October 1990, the Association will publish a further *Memoir* covering its history over the 1940–90 period. Finally, I have deposited a photocopy of all the early 'E.M.' letters concerning the BAA in the Association Library, where the researcher may also find a copy of the list of the Association's Archives.

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Figure 2. The announcement in *The Times* of the first meeting of what was to become the BAA.

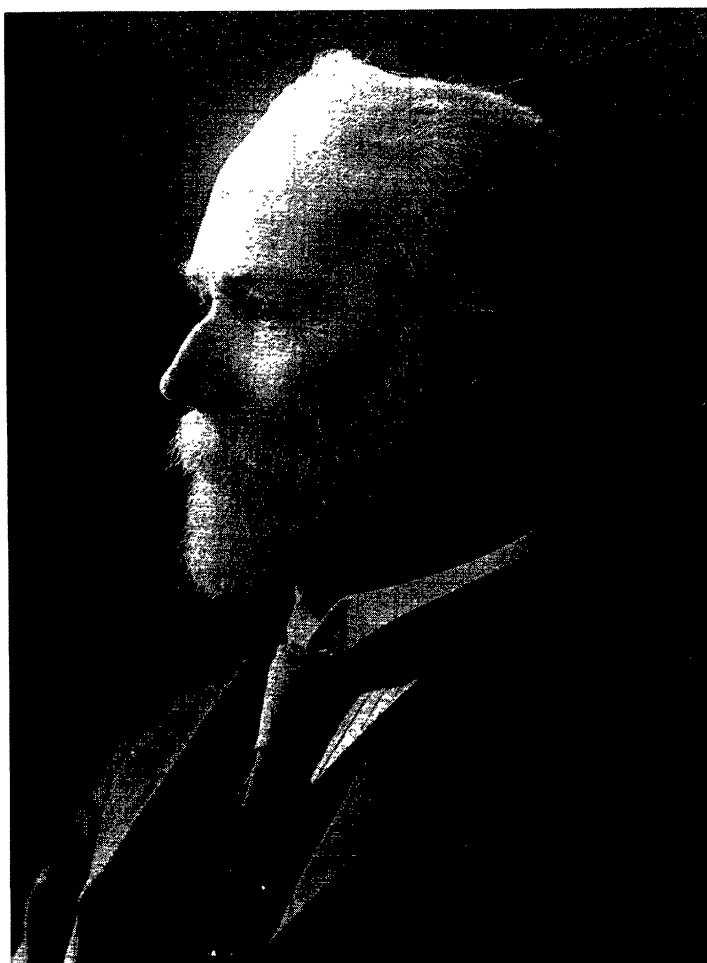


Figure 3. E. W. Maunder.