

# Astronomy is a big star of Ada Lovelace Day

October 6 2016

---

100 years ago the first women became Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society. To mark this anniversary, the RAS is a platinum sponsor of Ada Lovelace Day (ALD) on 11 October, which celebrates the achievements of women in science.

ALD Live! is the flagship event of the day, highlighting leading women in science and engineering in an evening of comedy, music, and general geekery, suitable for everyone over the age of 12. Taking place in the evening at the Institution of Engineering and Technology in London, performers come from across science and engineering. They include Dr Sheila Kanani, formerly a planetary scientist, who now leads the work of the RAS in diversity and public engagement, and is a science comedian in her spare time.

Sheila describes how women inspired her to pursue a career in science. "I feel honoured to be speaking at Ada Lovelace Day Live in 2016, the centenary of electing women as Fellows to the RAS. Both celebrations of past and present women in science and engineering are an excellent tribute to those who have forged the path to allow scientists like myself to get to where we are today. Without the strong female role models I've had I would never have thought that astrophysics was 'for me'. I hope that in speaking at the event I become a role model for future women in science and engineering, and that one day we might commemorate them in the same way!"

Throughout 2016 the RAS is honouring its earliest women Fellows, their lives, and their scientific achievements, including solar physicist Annie

Scott Dill Maunder, who was admitted 24 years after her first attempt; Fiammetta Wilson and A. Grace Cook, who both studied meteors, aurorae, the zodiacal light and comets; and lunar scientist Mary Adela Blagg.

The Society's house journal, A&G, features many of the women in a series of articles. A&G editor Dr Sue Bowler commented: "This year the RAS has been celebrating our first women Fellows, who joined the Society 100 years ago. I've been enjoying making the acquaintance of such fascinating women – they'd fit right in among today's scientists. Just as Ada Lovelace does not match what we think of as a woman of the early nineteenth century, these women challenge traditional ideas about women at the start of the twentieth century.

"The early women Fellows made careers in writing and lecturing to the public – what we would now call outreach – and drove forward [science](#) by developing new experimental techniques and innovative mathematical analysis, all the while enjoying lively family and social lives. They were educated and determined, as befits pioneers, and they were respected by their peers."

Other commemorative activities include the portraits of 20 contemporary astronomers and geophysicists; the designation of the Annie Maunder Medal for outreach; and the 'Way to the Stars', a specially commissioned play recreating the struggle of the first women astronomers for professional recognition. On ALD itself, RAS Librarian Dr Sian Prosser will run a drop-in event where visitors can see the newly rediscovered lantern slides astronomer Mary Proctor used in her public lectures.

Sian comments: "Mary Proctor's mission in life was to inspire people all over the world with an understanding and appreciation of astronomy, and that sense of wonder still emerges from her books and magic lantern

slides in the RAS library collection."

Provided by Royal Astronomical Society

Citation: Astronomy is a big star of Ada Lovelace Day (2016, October 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-10-astronomy-big-star-ada-lovelace.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.