

ICHM Grant for International Research Related ActivityActivity Report:

I attended the conference “A Global History of Eclipse Reckoning” in Edinburgh from the 18th to the 22nd of November 2024. The conference consisted of five days of talks, activities in Edinburgh related to history of science (trip to National Museum of Scotland, excursion to Royal Observatory Edinburgh), a conference dinner and a chance to brainstorm some outreach ideas based on the discussions we had had during the conference.



Figure 1: St Andrews cohort

I presented on the 19th of November, giving a talk entitled “‘The aspect of things was the most fearful that I ever saw’: Emotions and Victorian eclipse observations”. This presentation derived from my PhD research looking at the involvement of women in 19th century British astronomy expeditions. Putting together this presentation gave me the opportunity to follow up on a topic I’d been finding consistently in my archive sources, namely, the overwhelming nature of observing a solar eclipse and the worries that observers had in the first few decades of eclipse expeditions. You could not find a much more knowledgeable audience about what it is like to observe an eclipse (whether this knowledge comes through personal experiences, or historical research), and I received very encouraging and helpful feedback on my presentation.

This conference meant a lot to me, both personally and professionally. My interest in eclipse expeditions had begun as an undergraduate under the guidance of Deborah Kent when she joined the university in the middle of my Mathematics and Computer Science undergraduate. Working as a student assistant under her, and her continued guidance and support has significantly contributed to where I am today. During the conference there were other student assistants from St Andrews, some of whom I hadn’t seen since we had attended another history of astronomy conference together in 2021. It was incredible to reconnect in person (in Scotland) with both student and staff from St Andrews.

Secondly, at the moment, there is a growing group of scholars specifically working or interested in 19th century expeditions and astronomy. Through both our interactions during the sessions and spending time together outside the programmed hours of the conference, we were able to have many discussions over our topics, sharing insights, archive recommendations and encouragement. I am based at the MPIWG in Berlin, working in a cohort with vastly different projects and expertises. As much as I benefit from this interdisciplinary environment, I feel so lucky to have had this opportunity to talk to people who are both knowledgeable and as enthusiastic as I am about the same historical context. I hope to use the ICMS follow up grant scheme to continue developing these connections.

As well as reconnecting with these scholars, I had ample opportunity to make connections with other scholars working on adjacent fields, and massively benefited from the wide ranges of

approaches and interests represented in the conference line up. While I was most at home listening to talks on 19th and 20th century expeditions, some of the talks that I found most enjoyable were given by scholars working on vastly different locations and time periods from me.

Finally, the outreach session at the end of the conference was also incredible. On the last morning of the conference, we brainstormed about how we could use our insights from the week to make public outreach material for different age groups. My group was tasked with making plans for 13-18 year olds, and we came up with the idea for an “Eclipse Expedition Escape Room”, as seen in Figure 2. Public outreach is something I find personally very important when I am planning how I want to disseminate the findings from my PhD research, and it was great to receive so much feedback and enthusiastic responses. I was also able to talk to people after this session about possibilities and contacts for developing comics of the eclipse expeditions, and thoroughly enjoyed the key note lecture on Wednesday, given by Ana Matilde Sousa, the artist who created the graphic novel of the 1919 eclipse.

I returned to work the following week feeling both grateful and very excited to continue my PhD project. I am incredibly thankful to the ICHM for allowing me to attend this brilliant conference.

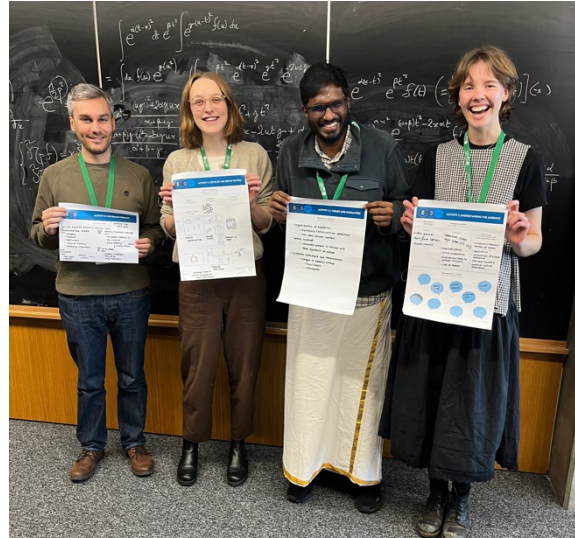


Figure 2: Group for the public outreach session with our escape room plans