

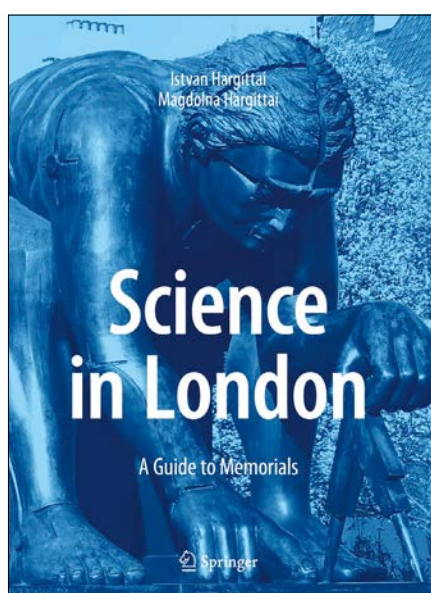
Science in London: A Guide to Memorials

By Istvan Hargittai and Magdolna Hargittai – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/eprn/2022202>

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” A famous quote from Isaac Newton, echoed by Einstein centuries later when, asked if he stood on the shoulders of Newton, he replied “No, on the shoulders of Maxwell”.

But Newton’s words deeply offended his contemporary Robert Hooke, who was of small stature and took the words as a personal gibe. The book “Science in London” delves into the stories of science, such as Newton and Hooke’s well-recorded shared animosity, and will appeal to anyone interested in the history of science and/or London. Its historical narrative offers us glimpses into the lives and contributions of hundreds of scientists, natural philosophers, explorers, and engineers; their stories told through their memorials in London. Although famous greats such as Einstein and Newton are well-represented, equal weighting is given to many more men and women whose contributions to the world we live in are just as profound. Who could imagine life without the electricity and telecommunications enabled by the astonishing achievements of Faraday and Maxwell? Or, particularly resonant today, the vaccines pioneered by Jenner? But “Science in London” goes deeper: showcasing other, more obscure, scientists who contributed to momentous discoveries. A great example is Benjamin Jesty, who deliberately – and successfully – inoculated his family against smallpox by exposing them to material from a cowpox-stricken cow.....20 years before Jenner’s vaccine. But Jesty neither published nor publicised his discovery, whereas Jenner did (a fantastic lesson for us scientists today!).

Women are given specific mention, particularly for their contributions to medicine, highlighting the colossal barriers and prejudice they faced in both education and practice. Even Queen Victoria is



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mentioned: by requesting the new innovation of anaesthesia during the birth of her eighth child, she enabled the scriptural precedent that suggested women should feel pain during childbirth to be overcome. Her advocacy changed the prevailing attitude of the time and enabled obstetrical anaesthesia to be commonplace, something millions of future women would be extremely grateful for.

“Science in London” uncovers the human side of science. Lord Kelvin may be best known for his substantial

contributions to thermodynamics, but here we learn about his enthusiasm for the new long-distance telegraph technology. He both proposed to his future wife – and received her answer – via telegraph. “Science in London” describes Lavoisier becoming embroiled in the politics of the French Revolution and being executed by guillotine, only to be exonerated shortly thereafter. We discover the man responsible for the word “banana”, the British botanist/spy who smuggled precious tea plants and knowledge out of China to augment the tea industry in India, and who the first person to perform true alchemy was. From a practical perspective, memorial photos are exhibited extensively throughout the book, and postcodes given for those readers seeking the memorials themselves.

“Science in London” covers the full swathe of human history, from the philosophers and mathematicians of the ancient era, such as Pythagoras and Archimedes, to scientists still alive today. Nor does the book focus solely on British scientists. Instead, it celebrates London’s openness and all those contributors to its position as a city of science, both past and future. ■

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