Norman Lockyer Collection

Sir Joseph Lockyer was born in Rugby in 1836, the only son of a surgeon-apothecary, Joseph Hooley Lockyer and was educated privately in England and he also studied languages on the Continent. At the age of twenty-one he became a clerk in the War Office, and married Winifred James in the following year. He developed an interest in astronomy and journalism, and in 1863 began to give scientific papers to the Royal Astronomical Society. It is his discovery of helium (a chemical not then known on Earth) which he has become most well known for. He was awarded a medal by the French Academy of Sciences in the same year for developing a new technique to observe solar prominences at times other than eclipses.

In 1869 Lockyer founded the journal 'Nature', which he edited until a few months before his death, and which remains to this day a major resource for international scientific knowledge. In 1870 he was appointed secretary to the Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction, which over the next five years reported on scientific education and resulted in the government setting up a laboratory of solar physics at South Kensington. To further this work Lockyer was transferred from the War Office to the Science and Art Department at South Kensington in 1875. Here he organised an international exhibition of scientific apparatus, as well as establishing the loan collection which eventually formed the nucleus of the collections of the Science Museum.

Throughout this period, Lockyer continued to be active in astronomical observations and in spectroscopic studies in the laboratory of the College of Chemistry; he also wrote several books on astronomy and spectral analysis. Lockyer also studied the correlations between solar activity and weather, and developed interests in meteorology. In 1878 he was given charge of the solar-physics work then being carried out at South Kensington, being made Director of the Solar Physics Laboratory. Lockyer also became a lecturer in the Normal School Science in 1881, and became the first professor of astronomical physics in 1887, a post which he held until 1901. Lockyer continued his work as Director of the Solar Physics Laboratory until 1913, when he moved to Devon with his wife where they had built a retirement home at Sidmouth. On the suggestion of Francis McLean, the son of the astronomer and philanthropist Frank McLean, Lockyer established a solar observatory at Sidmouth. This observatory was set up for astrophysical observations, and was called the Hill Observatory (renamed the Norman Lockyer Observatory in 1921), which is still in existence today. Lockyer died in Salcombe Regis, Devon, in August 1920.

Archives and Rare Books Resources Held by the University of Exeter

EUL MS 186	Letters from people such as Sir William Ramsay, and four notes/jottings by Norman Lockyer (1895)
EUL MS 72	The working papers of the Observatory and research papers of members of staff. Financial records and annual reports are included (1913-1990s)
EUL MS 236	The file contains 13 letters from correspondents to Lockyer (1869-1919). Also included is a typescript 'List of English gentleman who are invited to make nominations of candidates for the Nobel prizes in Physics and Chemistry for the year 1904'
EUL MS 246	Small collection contains items relating to the finances of the Observatory in its capacity as the Norman Lockyer Observatory Corporation of the University of Exeter (1944-1966)
EUL MS 110 add.	Box of letters consisting of photocopied letters to Norman Lockyer which were photocopied and used by Professor A J Meadows in 1967 during his research on 'Science and Controversy: a Biography of Norman Lockyer'
EUL MS 128	Consists mainly of papers relating to the administration of the Norman Lockyer Observatory, as well as containing administrative records of the Library and offprints of various scientific journals, some photographs are also contained, as well as notes on the history of the Observatory (1851-1985)
EUL MS 110	Correspondences and research papers (1860-1920)
EUL MS 114	Materials regarding Lockyer himself eg. obituaries and memorials, but the bulk of this collection is made up of papers concerning the administration of the Norman Lockyer Observatory (c 1876-c 1969)