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## REVIEWS

**Einstein in Oxford**, by Andrew Robinson (Bodleian Library Publishing), 2024. Pp. 96, 20.5 × 13.5 cm. Price £16.99 (hardbound; ISBN 978 1 85124 638 0).

Ulm, Zurich, Bern, Prague, Berlin, Princeton. Most readers will immediately think of Einstein when encountering the names of those cities in which he lived. But Oxford? Einstein never lived in Oxford, but it is a place which he visited several times, first on his first trip to England in 1921 when he lectured in Manchester and London but also visited Oxford due to the invitation of Frederick Lindemann, professor of experimental philosophy (*i.e.*, physics). He returned at Lindemann's invitation in 1931, 1932, and 1933. Born in Germany, Lindemann was brought up and educated in England, though he returned temporarily to Germany in his teens for some schooling. He thought of himself as more English than the English and, in contrast to Einstein, had very conservative political views, but at the same time great respect for Einstein's science and for him as a person. On the same day I bought this book, just across the street I also saw the famous Einstein blackboard (which contains some mistakes) in the History of Science Museum (whose director, Silke Ackermann, one of many German-born English residents mentioned in this review, provides a foreword), which dates from his Rhodes Lecture in 1931 (which finally took place after several attempts since 1927 to attract Einstein back for a second visit); during that visit Einstein also received an honorary doctorate (with an oration in Latin, putting him into a similar situation as that of those who couldn't understand his lectures in German). The book's preface discusses the blackboard and the first chapter Lindemann and his invitations.

Chapter two discusses aspects of Einstein's work relevant to his 1933 Herbert Spencer lecture. When visiting Oxford, Einstein (sometimes living in Lewis Carroll's former quarters) also indulged his interests besides science, especially music. As the third chapter describes, that was well documented by Margaret Deneke (whose parents had been born in Germany; her mother was also a close friend of Clara Schumann). In addition to playing a borrowed violin, Einstein also sat for a portrait and, in 1933, gave the Deneke lecture on atomic theory. The fourth chapter explores other aspects of Einstein in Oxford, such as writing a (perhaps Carroll-inspired) poem about himself, appearing in a stained-glass window, and Lindemann's attempts to get Einstein elected as a Fellow of Christ

Church, hoping that he would spend a month or so each year there in return for a stipend of £400. He was indeed elected (on 1931 October 21), but Lindemann had to deal both with protests about money going to foreigners and with the tax office. His life in Oxford was not dissimilar to that in Germany, spending time sailing, walking, dealing with female admirers, and discussing politics.

The final chapter discusses Einstein as a refugee from Nazi Germany, making use of his Oxford connections to spend some time there in 1933, arriving from Belgium. Although Einstein noted that his connections with Oxford had grown stronger, he returned to Belgium *via* Glasgow and never came back to Oxford. He did return to England, though, discussing politics with Churchill and later, after hearing of assassination threats in Belgium, hid out alone for a while in rural Norfolk, guarded by Commander Oliver Locker-Lampson. On 1933 October 7, joined by his wife, Einstein boarded a ship in Southampton bound for New York. He never returned to Europe.

The book contains many quotations\*, the sources for which appear on seven pages of the now-default small print, followed by two pages with a wide range of suggestions for further reading, a page of acknowledgements, and a three-page index. Robinson has written several books on a wide range of topics, including two others on Einstein; this one is well written and almost free of typos and questionable matters of style. This book provides an interesting glimpse of times and places often mentioned just briefly if not at all in other accounts of Einstein's life. (For an interesting collection of better-known anecdotes, see another book<sup>1</sup> reviewed<sup>2</sup> here not long ago.) Black-and-white pictures of Einstein (and others) in Oxford as well as of his poem (and its translation into English) and of Einstein in a stained-glass window, like William Golding (who was an undergraduate in science before switching to literature and wished that he knew more German) describing his chance meeting with Einstein on a bridge, bring Einstein in Oxford to life. Recommended for those who are interested in more detail on this aspect of Einstein's life, with only a cursory discussion of his science. — PHILLIP HELBIG.

### References

- (1) S. Graydon, *Einstein in Time and Space: A Life in 99 Particles* (John Murray), 2023.
- (2) P. Helbig, *The Observatory*, 144, 295, 2024.

**A Crack in Everything: How Black Holes Came in from the Cold and Took Cosmic Centre Stage**, by Marcus Chown (Head of Zeus), 2024. Pp. 350, 20 × 13 cm. Price £12.99 (paperback; ISBN 978 1 80454 433 4).

The late, great Leonard Cohen isn't mentioned directly (nor, as far as I can tell, indirectly) in the book, so I don't know if the title is intended as an allusion ("There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in") or is just an illusion. In any case, this book by former Caltech radio astronomer and prolific popular-science writer Marcus Chown is one of a large number of books on black holes, some of which I've reviewed in these pages. Although there is often little overlap between those which I had already read, I asked

\*The one on p. 62 contains a sentence starting with "Then in spite of his scientific position he is a poor man", perhaps the first time I have seen 'then' used where today one would use 'for', though the usage was clear due to it being cognate with the German '*denn*', which is used only in that sense. ('Then' in the sense of 'after' is '*dann*'.)