



Edmond Halley

1656 - 1742

Edmond Halley's fame is due mainly to the comet named after him but he worked in many other areas of science, too.

Halley was born in Shoreditch, at that time a village on the outskirts of London. His father was quite-well-off, owning property and being in business as a soap-boiler. Unfortunately, the Great Fire of 1666 destroyed much of his property. Young Halley was good at mathematics at school and he was interested in astronomy. His first expedition as a young man of 20 was to St. Helena where **he observed the passage of the planet Mercury across the Sun's disc**; he also made a catalogue of the positions of 360 stars. His work was so impressive that he was elected Fellow of The Royal Society at the age of 22.

Halley was a friend of the genius Isaac Newton and he stimulated the great man; he even paid for the publication of Newton's famous Principia.

He married Mary Tooke and they lived happily together for 55 years.

In 1684 his father was found murdered and, sadly, there were legal problems between Halley and his late father's second wife.

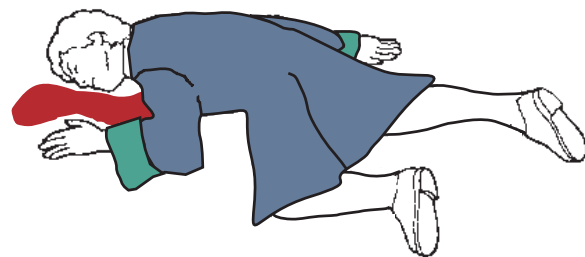
Halley was quite a character, it is said that **'he drank brandy like a sea captain and swore like one'**! He had a difficult time because his religious views were ahead of the time and the result was that his career was slow in developing. Nevertheless, he kept at it and he made some discoveries to do with the tides, the age of the Earth, the Earth's magnetism, and - of course - comets.



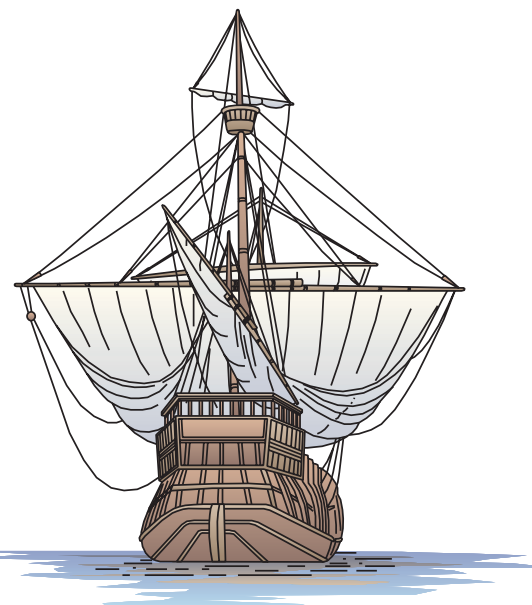
Halley's comet

An early telescope

His father was found murdered



He drank brandy like a sea captain



In 1705 Halley published a book in which he predicted that 53 years hence a bright comet would appear again, this object having been seen previously in 1531, 1607 and 1682. Halley had used **Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation** in making his prediction. The eventual observation of the comet, after Halley's death, proved that Newton's Law applied over very big distances and that comets do indeed make orbits round the Sun.

Halley was made Astronomer Royal (the second holder of this position) in 1720 at the age of 64 and he immediately started to make very accurate observations of the Moon, the idea being to produce tables of positions which would help mariners find their location at sea. These measurements continued for over 20 years. However, a method using clocks eventually proved better for navigation.

Edmond Halley was a remarkable man; not only was he an astronomer but he also built underwater diving equipment, took an interest in archaeology and even worked out a basis for life assurance.

A.W.W.