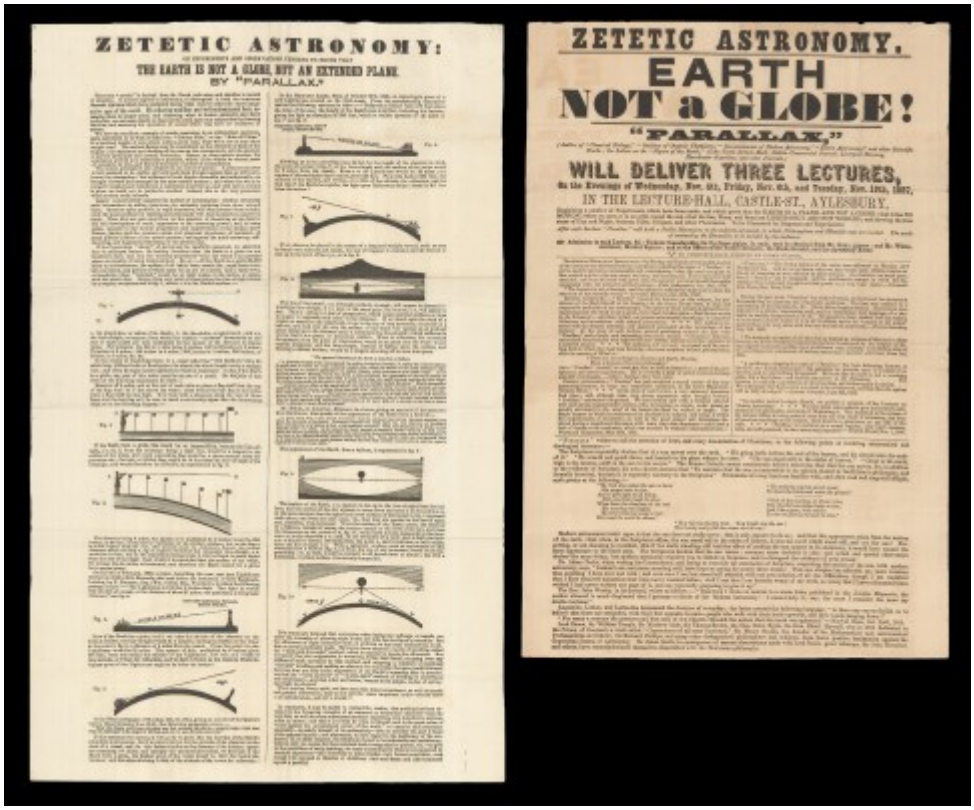


Two printed broadsides (375 by 250 mm and 430 by 280 mm), with drop-head titles, text printed in two columns, with woodcut illustrations, light toning.

THE ORIGINS OF FLAT EARTH THEORY

Zetetic Astronomy: or experiments and observations tending to prove that the earth is not a globe, but an extended plane.

Author
PARALLAX [i.e. Samuel Birley ROWBOTHAM]

Publication date
1857].

Publisher

Publication place
[Britain,

Physical description
Two printed broadsides (375 by 250 mm and 430 by 280 mm), with drop-head titles, text printed in two columns, with woodcut illustrations, light toning.

Dimensions
375 by 250mm. (14.75 by 9.75 inches).

Notes
Two exceptionally rare broadsides concerning flat earth theory.

As a young man, English inventor, writer and general con-artist Samuel Birley Rowbotham

(1816-1884) spent his time organising a cooperative community in Cambridgeshire, inspired by his utopian socialist ideals. While working as part of this community, he first formulated his ideas about the shape of the Earth, after observing a lack of curvature on the drainage ditches of the Old Bedford River. The straight 21 mile stretch of the Bedford Levels was enough to convince Rowbotham that the Earth was in fact flat.

He soon began lecturing on his marvellous new theory, which he named zetetic astronomy and which propounded a model of the Earth as a flat disc centred around the North Pole and bounded by a perimeter wall of ice. Rowbotham seems not to have fully explored all the implications of his idea, however, as he once fled from one of his own lectures, which had a sixpence entry fee, when asked to explain why a ship's hull disappears before its mast when sailing out to see. Nonetheless he persisted with the theory and in 1849 published under the pseudonym "Parallax" a 16-page pamphlet, which was expanded into a book in 1865 and then extended into a third edition of 430 pages in 1881.

In the intervening years, Rowbotham had had 17 known children, at least one of whom he accidentally killed through poisoning. Indeed, he was found responsible for a number of other deaths from the quack cure of phosphorus, which he sold under the name of Dr Samuel Birley. Among his other questionable pursuits was the invention of a "life-preserving cylindrical railway carriage", for which he secured a patent. Naturally, Rowbotham also founded a society with branches in both London and New York: the magazine of the Universal Zetetic Society, entitled The Earth Not a Globe Review, remained active until the early part of the twentieth century. After a slow decline the movement was revived in 1956 as The Flat Earth Society.

The present broadsheets present Rowbotham's theory in the form of an illustrated summary, complete with ten woodcuts depicting experiments, diagrams and cross-sections, and an advertisement for a series of upcoming lectures at Castle-St., Aylesbury in November 1857. According to his astronomy, the world's continents float on an infinite ocean which has a layer of fire underneath, and the lands we know are surrounded by an infinite wilderness of ice and snow, beyond the Antarctic Ocean, bordered by an immense circular ice cliff.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 21523

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