

Hitchins, Malachy (b. 1741, Gwennap - d. 1809), astronomer and mathematician, born at Little Trevince Gwennap, Cornwall, son of Thomas Hitchins. and mother was the sister of Thomas Martyn, cartographer. He is reputed to first have worked as a miner and then to have assisted Benjamin Donn on surveying a map of Devon. During this time he started to contribute mathematical replies to problems posted in The Ladies Diary. Matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford in 1763, where he met his wife Joanna Hawkin whom he married in 1764. He did not graduate until 27th Feb 1781. In 1785 he was incorporated into St John College Cambridge where he graduated with his MA in the same year.

In 1767 Hitchins was recommended to the Astronomer Royal, Nevil Maskelyne for the position of computer on the Nautical Almanac by Thomas Hornsby, Savillian Chair of Astronomy at Oxford. In 1769, he became a comparer, a role he retained until his death in 1809. During the production of the Nautical Almanac he employed local people including William Dunkin who worked as his assistant from 1809. Other assistants are listed at the end of this biography.

From April - August 1769 Hitchins replaced William Bayley as assistant to the Astronomer Royal Maskelyne -Bayley was travelling to Norway to observe the transit of Venus. Hitchins successfully observed the Transit of Venus (3 Jun. 1769) in the eastern summer house with Rev'd William Hurst. He made numerous other observations at Greenwich along with his other roles as Assistant Astronomer. Here he entered holy orders and after a short period at Exeter he returned to Cornwall. In 1775 he becomes vicar of St. Hilary and resided at the vicarage in that village. In 1785 he also took the parish of Gwinear, he retained both livings until his death.

Hitchins had four sons, his third child William Malachy Hitchins worked briefly as an assistant to Maskelyne at Greenwich in 1787. He will be remembered for his continuous work to compile the Nautical Almanac to a high standard. He should also be acknowledged for his wide influence on a number of local people introducing them into the field of science and astronomy. Most famously these include Edwin Dunkin and son of his assistant William Dunkin. Also, it should be noted he knew Davis Gilbert (Giddy) the future president of the Royal Society for whom he gave private lessons and remained a close lifelong friend. He also introduced John Hellins (FRS) to Maskelyne, the Astronomer Royal and used his influence to obtain him a paid astronomical role worth £86 a year at the Greenwich Observatory.