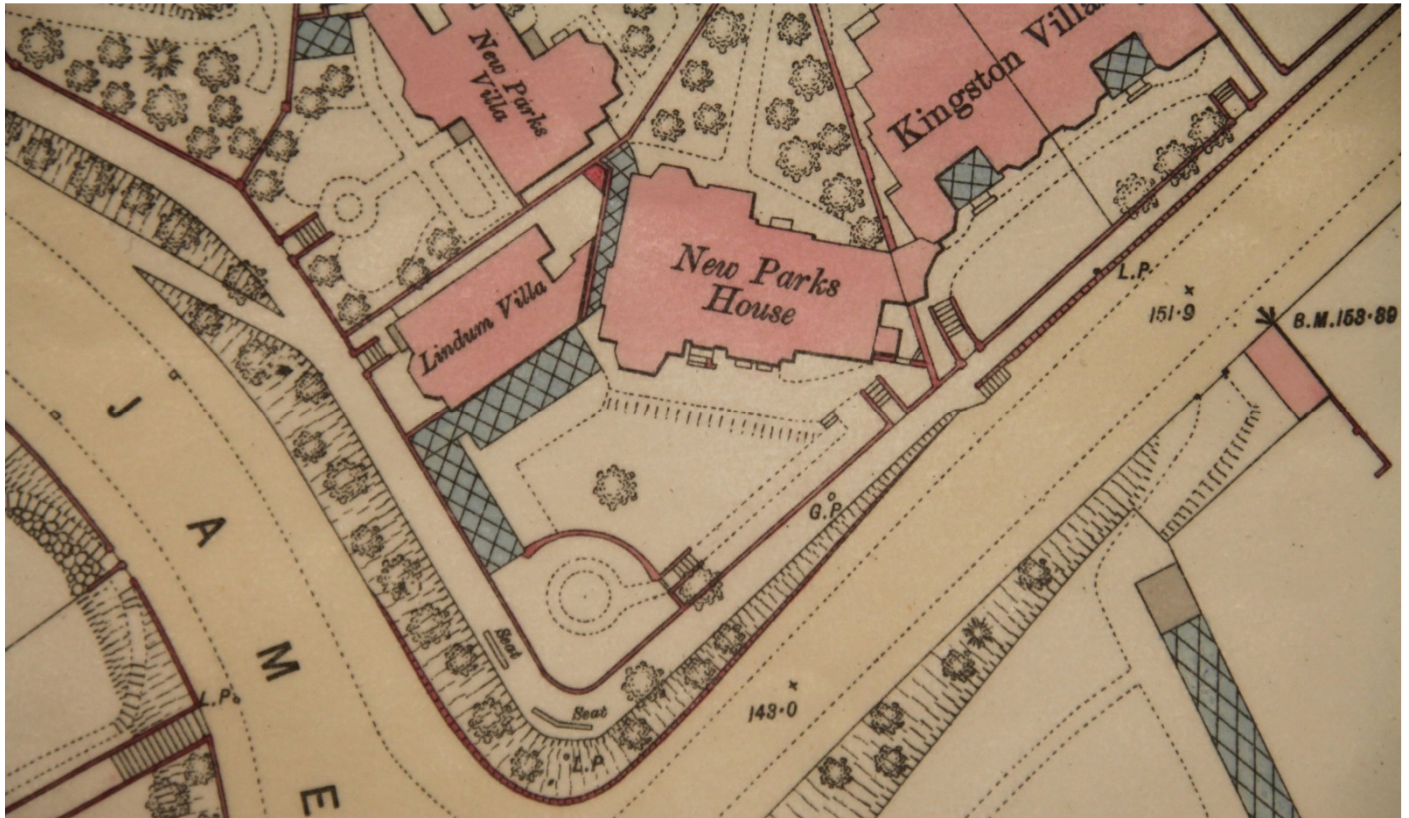


The Wigglesworth Observatory

In 2005, local Astronomer Dave Hawkrige came across an isolated reference to a major astronomical observatory being sited in Scarborough in the late Victorian era. He did a lot of research over the next few months and below is a very abridged version of the story that he unearthed.

Scarborough did indeed have a major observatory that was at the forefront of astronomical discovery and a number of galactic objects were first seen and catalogued through its telescope.

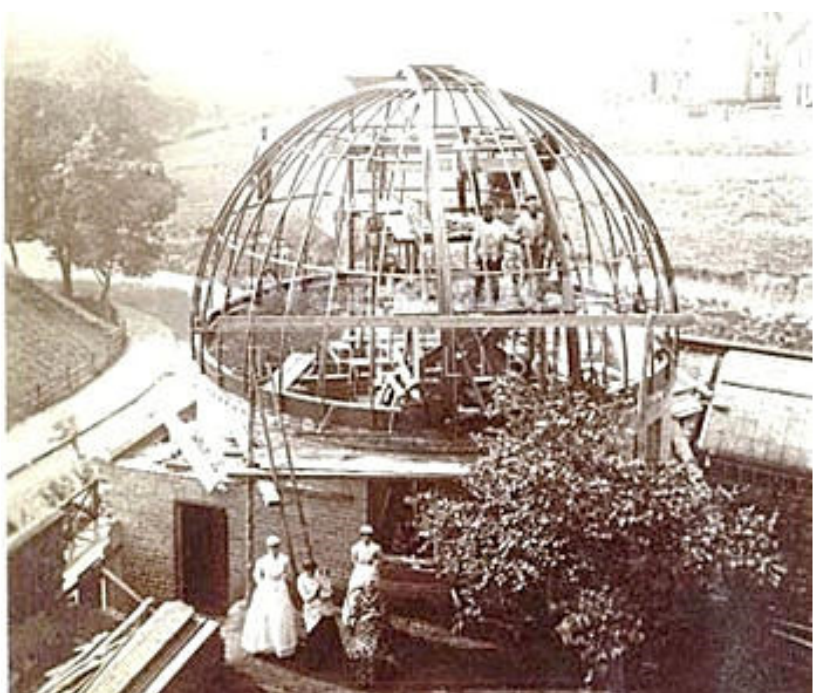


The observatory was in the grounds of a house in New Parks Crescent close to the corner of St James Road and Londesborough road.

The observatory was built in 1884-1885 for James Wigglesworth (1815-1888), a businessman and amateur astronomer.

James owned the astronomical firm of Thomas Cooke & Sons of York, and it was they who supplied and erected the 30' dome and within it the telescope.

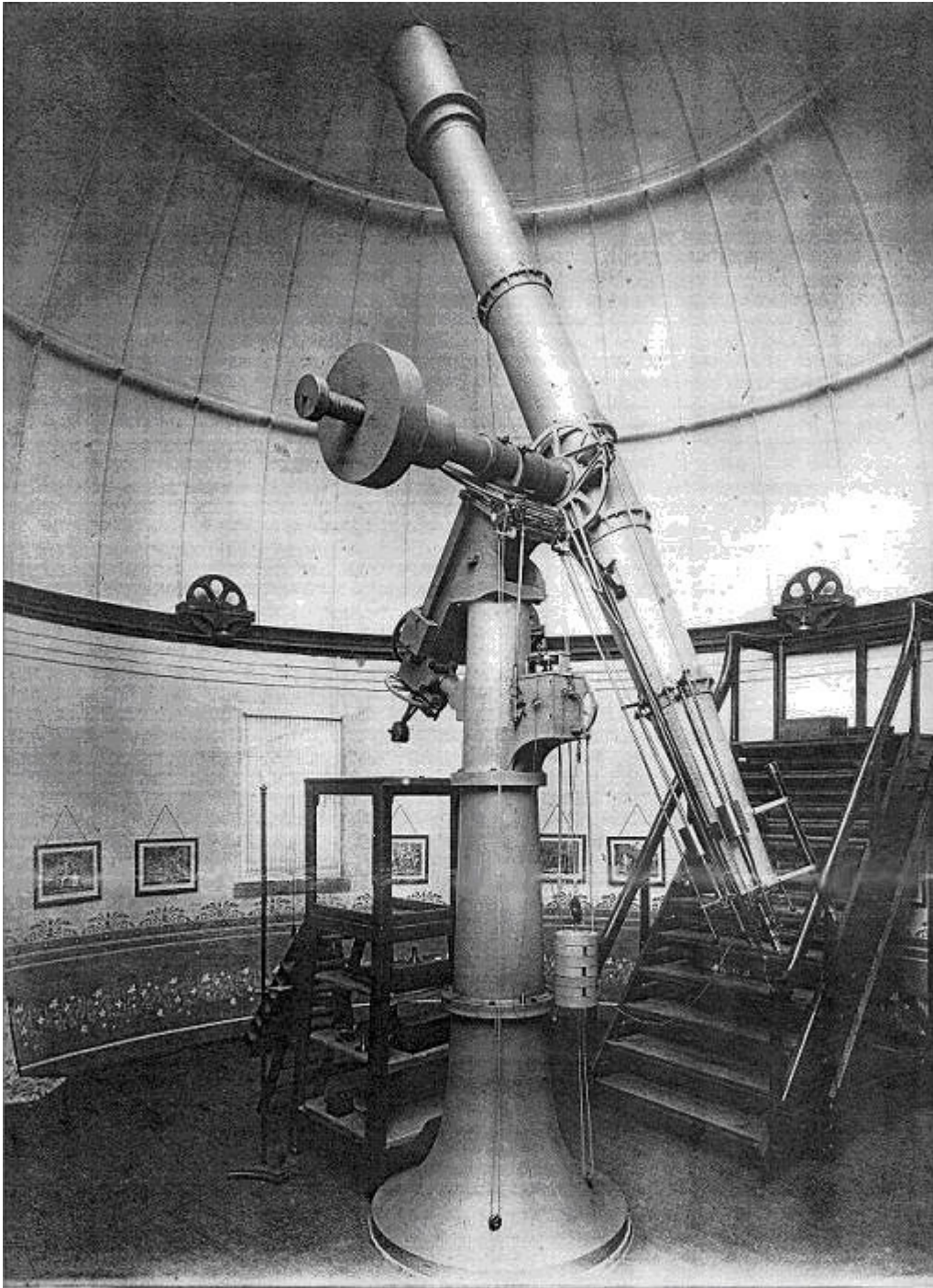
A photo exists in the science museum collection of the observatory when it was under construction. This telescope was the second largest refractor in



Britain at the time. The largest one was at Gateshead, where it was badly affected by smoke from local factories. The Scarborough telescope was more effective because of the clearer air.

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Another photo exists in the Science Museum collection of the telescope within the dome.



James turned 70 years old in 1885 and his eyesight was starting to fail so he employed a professional astronomer J Gerhard Lohse to help with the observing. Together they began to find stars, galaxies and other stellar objects that had not been recorded before.

NGC No	Constellation	Date	Type
793	Triangulum	1886	2 stars
1446	Taurus	1886	2 stars
1655	Taurus	1886	Not Found
1674	Taurus	1886	Not Found
1675	Taurus	1886	Not Found
2193	Orion	1886	4 stars
2412	Canis Minor	1886	Star
2518	Lynx	1886	Galaxy
2519	Lynx	1886	Star
2565	Cancer	1886	Galaxy
5884	Bootes	1886	2 stars
6344	Hercules	1886	2 stars
6353	Hercules	1886	3 stars
6731	Lyra	1886	Star Group
6767	Lyra	1886	2 stars
6792	Lyra	1886	Galaxy
7114	Cygnus	1885	Star + Nebula?

NGC” in the table adjacent stands for the “New General Catalogue” of stellar objects that was compiled by Louis Emil Dreyer in 1888. It contained 7,840 objects. About every 1 in 500 objects in it were first seen and recorded in Scarborough! – The table contains those items recorded in Scarborough by James Wigglesworth and Gerhard Lohse.

In the same year of 1885, James was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, but he died only three years later in 1888. His family cannot have thought the observatory was worth keeping because it was quickly sold after his death to another amateur astronomer, a Mr Vincenzo Cerulli of Italy.

Nothing now exists at New Parks Crescent except buried foundations, but about half a mile away is South Cliff Methodist Church.

This was being built about the same time as the observatory. On the face of the church tower that faces the observatory can be seen two white disks. They are best seen from the west side of Filey road. James Wigglesworth was part of the congregation and arranged for them to be set there. On closer inspection, the disks are enamelled brass dials from large pocket watches of the late Victorian era. After 100 years in the Sun and salt air, most of the figures have worn off. In early 2007, a telescope revealed faint marks remaining at some of the 5 minute intervals and suggested that the lower dial had a smaller subsidiary dial for a second’s pointer. In some circles the discs are known as "The Lady and Gentleman pocket watches". It is amazing they still remain on the church today, well over 100 years after the observatory has been removed



We don’t know why he had them put there? They could have been to assist him in aligning the telescope but none of the local astronomers can suggest how they might have been used. Another possibility is they were used to demonstrate the power of the telescope during daylight when no stars were visible. The figures on the watch dials would have been readable by the telescope.

The dome and telescope were dismantled and removed from Scarborough on or about 30th June 1890.

It was transported to Italy, and re-erected on a hill called Collurania, near Teramo where it still exists today.

It was this telescope that enabled Vincenzo to end the debate over the Martian canals.

Some Astronomers had claimed to see canals on Mars. Some even said they could see green



vegetation growing alongside the canals suggesting the canals were carrying water. We now believe the canals were optical illusions from the early telescopes not being powerful enough to resolve the images and that any green edges were colour defects from the same source. This 15" was one of the first telescopes big enough and clear enough to confirm that the canals did not exist.

After 1917, The observatory and telescope passed to the Italian state and became known as the 'Osservatorio Astronomico di Collurania - Teramo V Cerulli'. As developments in Astronomy moved on, it became a museum and tourist attraction.

Brian Mulvana, 100521