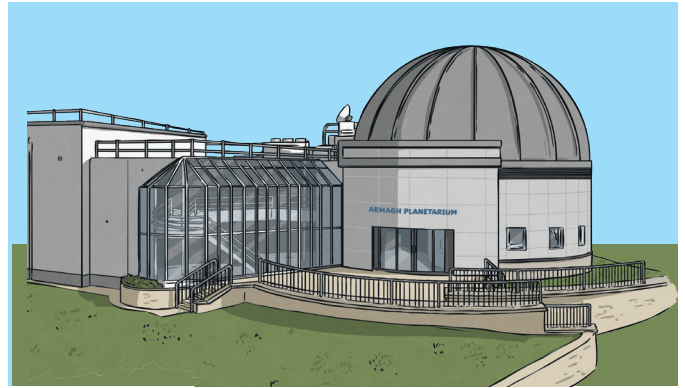


Armagh Observatory

An observatory is a building from which scientists can watch the planets and stars.

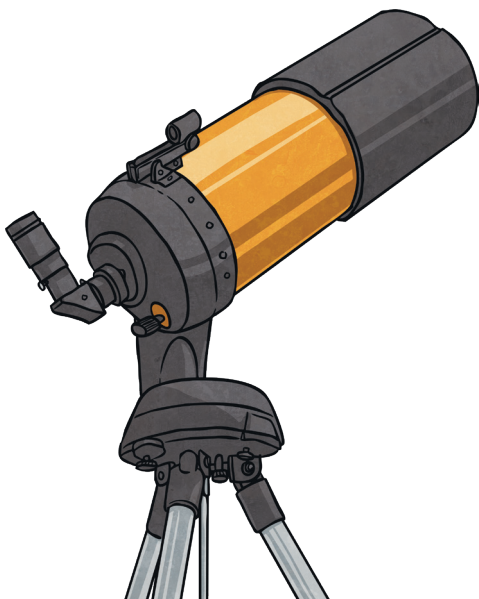
In 1765, Richard Robinson became Archbishop of Armagh. He was an influential man whose position gave him the opportunity for building and expansion in the city. He employed prominent architects to design new buildings, including an observatory.



The main task of observatories at this time was to accurately map the positions of the stars. Francis Johnston, an architect from Armagh (who would later design the GPO in Dublin), was chosen to design the observatory. It was completed and opened in 1790, with Reverend JA Hamilton as its first director.

In 1794, daily readings of weather conditions began at Armagh and they continue to the present day. This long history means that the recording in Armagh is the longest calibrated daily weather record anywhere in the UK or Ireland. Historic data can help scientists studying global warming and weather patterns.

Neville Maskelyne, the Astronomer Royal for England, advised Reverend Hamilton about the requirements and equipment needed for a modern observatory. It was greatly important that observatories possessed accurate clocks and Maskelyne asked Thomas Earnshaw, one of the best-regarded watchmakers in London, to make a clock for Armagh. His first clock is now regarded as a masterpiece, believed to be the most accurate in the world at the time. The pendulum clock was purchased for one hundred pounds and Earnshaw charged another hundred pounds to travel to Armagh in 1794 and install the timepiece.



Neville Maskelyne recommended the purchase of a telescope for the Observatory. Archbishop Robinson purchased the $2\frac{3}{4}$ -inch equatorial telescope in 1795, from the English makers John and Edward Troughton. This telescope is still at the observatory and is now the oldest telescope in the world continuously kept in its original dome.

Thomas Romney Robinson was the third director of Armagh Observatory, holding the post for 59 years! Robinson was horrified by the terrible storm that hit Ireland in 1839, known as 'The Night of the Big Wind'.

The destruction caused by the ferocious winds inspired him to work on an anemometer (a device to measure wind speed). Robinson invented a new type of anemometer, using four cup-like shapes to catch the wind. The wind speed could be determined by how fast the cups were spinning and then by performing calculations. He installed his anemometer on the roof of the observatory in 1845 and it is still there today.

Dr Eric Lindsay, from County Armagh, became the seventh director of Armagh Observatory in 1937. Lindsay believed in collaboration and he proposed that both observatories on the island of Ireland, Armagh and Dunsink (in Dublin), should join forces with Harvard University in the USA to build a new telescope that could look to the skies of the southern hemisphere. With cross-border co-operation and the involvement of Harvard, the Armagh-Dunsink-Harvard (ADH) telescope was built in South Africa.

In the 21st Century, scientists at Armagh Observatory still look to the stars and astrophysics research and work continues. Modern technology means that the scientists in Armagh can access telescopes all over the world, but the historic equipment of their predecessors also remains on site. The observatory now sits alongside a planetarium and Armagh continues its long tradition as Northern Ireland's 'space city'!