

LIBRARY

Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

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MISSION

To meet the demand for general and specialised up-to-date astronomical information and services from the public, business and educational community while furthering scientific research in astronomy in conjunction with other astronomy institutions and universities.



ACTIVITIES

- ★ Research
- ★ Information
- ★ Educational and visitor services

HISTORY

The first Premier of WA, Sir John Forrest, opened the original Perth Observatory in 1896 at a site close to the centre of Perth on Mt Eliza near Kings Park. Here it conducted astronomical research and provided an accurate time service, accurate latitude and longitude reference point, training for surveyors and public education activities.

In the early 1960's "light pollution" from the growing city of Perth made a move away to a better site necessary. The old telescope enclosures were demolished, and the original administration building is now the headquarters of the National Trust.

Now into its second century, Australia's oldest continuously operating, and sole remaining state, astronomical observatory is situated in the locality of Bickley in the Darling Range. This site is adequate for astronomical research, yet it is only 25km east of the city and conveniently close for the public to attend its educational activities.

Perth has the only significant observatory between South Africa and the Eastern States of Australia. Its importance on the globe is further enhanced by the fact that the centre of our galaxy (the Milky Way) passes almost overhead. Few observatories have such a direct view of this important part of the Milky Way.

TELESCOPES

Housed in special enclosures in the tree-lined grounds are the Observatory's three major telescopes. The largest instrument, the automated Perth-Lowell 61cm Cassegrain Reflector, is used for CCD (electronic) imaging, photometry and photography.

The 33cm Astrographic Refractor, the original main instrument, has been in operation since 1901 when it was used to photographically map the southern skies. It is now used to photograph bright comets.

Recently, a 25cm Robotic Telescope was built in the Observatory's workshop. It is equipped with a CCD camera and it is used to track faint comets and asteroids in order for their orbits to be calculated, and to monitor the brightness of stars.

A public viewing facility has also been established among the research buildings and is equipped with several telescopes. The newest building in this facility was funded from visitor entry fees and houses the largest telescope dedicated to use by visitors—a 40cm Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector. Arguably the most popular telescope in this facility is the fully restored 32-cm Calver Telescope. It was originally purchased for the public to view Halley's Comet—during the 1910 apparition! A 35-cm Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector is also housed in its own building and like the other reflector is used for public viewing and well as teaching.



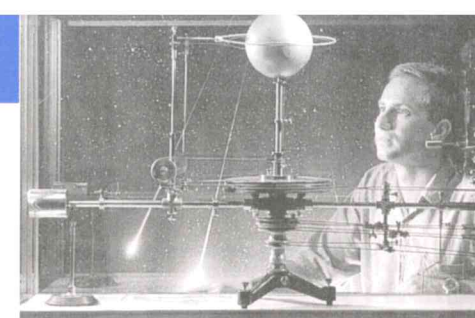
Astrographic Telescope. Photo – Robert Garvey

MAIN BUILDING

The administration building contains various offices and facilities. These include a visitor reception area, sales counter, mechanical workshop, electronics lab, plate-measuring room, photographic darkroom, lecture theatre and a reference library. The library is available during office hours Monday to Friday by appointment.

MUSEUM

A museum area has been established to inform visitors about the history of the Observatory and to educate them in the science of astronomy. On display are instruments and artefacts from the Old Perth Observatory, astrophotographs, paintings, meteorites from the WA Museum, and the contents of the time capsule donated at the Observatory's foundation in 1896.



Orrey instrument. Photo – Robert Garvey

VISITOR ACCESS/PUBLIC EDUCATION

Visitors can view the wonders of the southern skies from the public viewing facility on a **star viewing night**. These nights are very popular so booking is essential.

Alternatively, we can bring portable telescopes to your site for an **astronomy field night** in order to show you the stars. Booking is essential.

Guided tours of the Observatory facilities are also conducted the first Sunday of each month at 2pm. Booking not required.

Weekday **guided tours** of the Observatory facilities are available to schools and community groups. Booking is essential.

Telephone the Observatory on 9293 8255 between 9:00am and 4:00pm (working days) to enquire about details and charges.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Perth Observatory is keen to get the public more involved in its activities. One way to directly participate and assist is to join our volunteer programme. Current projects involve assisting permanent staff with the public star viewing sessions, assisting at open days, and archiving historical documents. Those interested should first telephone the Observatory, and then send a written application to the Government Astronomer in August. The applicant should outline why they wish to become part of the program, what skills, qualifications or experience they possess, what realistic amount of time they can contribute and anything else that they think is relevant.