

Star gazing in Sligo



‘A Gentleman’s Observatory’

Markree Castle

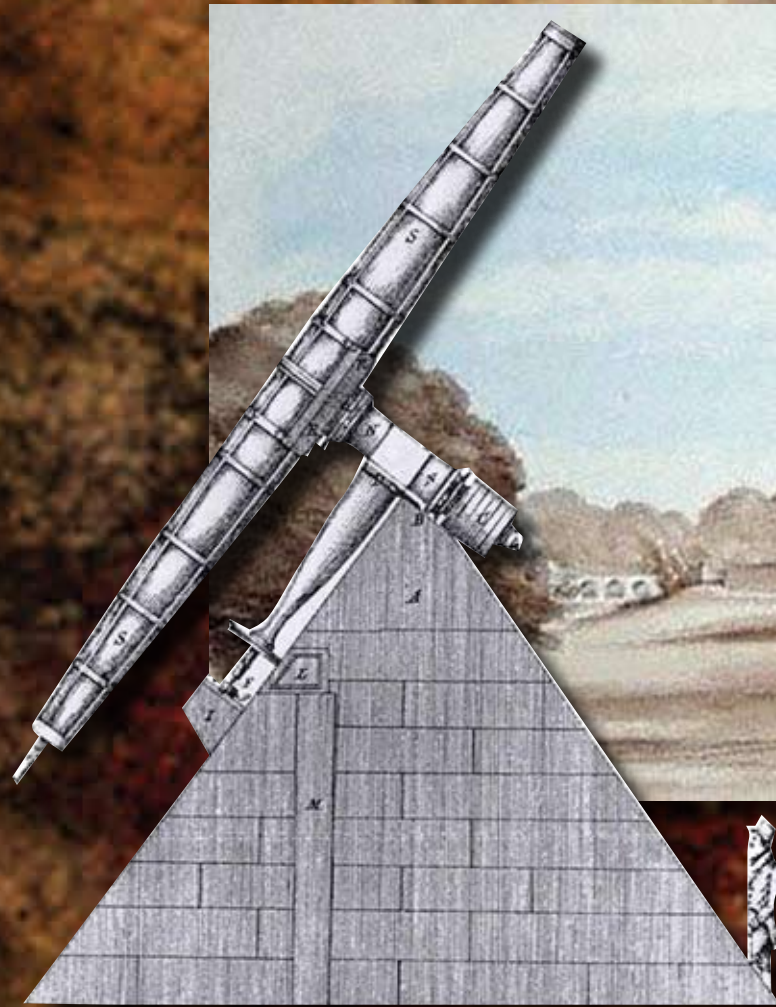
In the mid 1800s, Markree Castle was home to Edward J. Cooper – an enthusiastic (and wealthy) amateur astronomer, who set up and supported an observatory.

It was a type of ‘gentleman’s observatory’ - which wasn’t uncommon in Ireland in those days - there was also one in Birr and one in Armagh.

The Markree Observatory is significant because it was home to one of the largest telescopes in the world at the time - a 13.3 inch refracting telescope.

When Edward Cooper died in 1863, the observatory was left idle for a number of years, until his nephew Colonel Cooper reactivated the observations.

Colonel Cooper’s interests were mainly meteorological, and the observatory at Markree was later described in the monthly notices of the Royal Astronomical Society as “...one of the best meteorological stations in Ireland”.



The telescope mounted at Markree in 1834 by Thomas Grubb, who went on to make telescopes for the world’s greatest observatories. ©Sligo County Library

Telescope Holder, Markree Observatory. Note the size of the telescope holder compared to the car to the left of the picture. ©Buildings of Ireland.



Markree Castle. Drawn on the spot for Colonel Cooper by William Frederick Wakeman. ©Sligo County Library

‘Book post to Victoria Street’

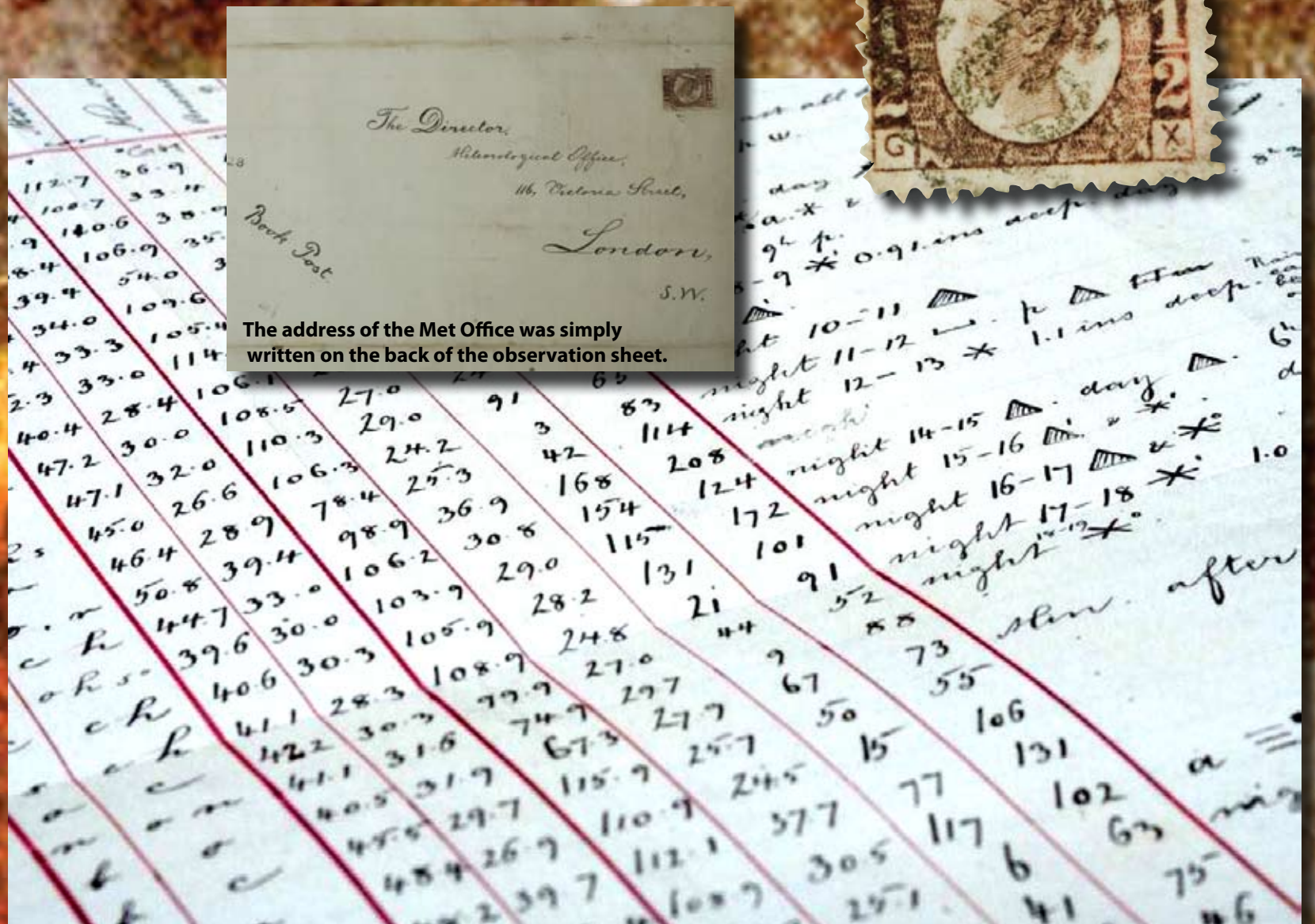
The Meteorological Records

The Met Éireann Library holds meteorological records from Markree Castle from 1869 to 1968.

The records give readings of atmospheric pressure, temperature, wind direction, wind speed, cloud cover and rainfall (among other data).

Observations were made at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. every day. The records were handwritten on broadsheet-sized templates which were issued by the Meteorological Office in London.

At the end of each month, the pages were folded into the size of an envelope and posted to London. The picture to the right shows the postage stamps and the address of the Met Office, written on the reverse of the observation sheet. You can also see the creases where it was folded into the size of an envelope.



The address of the Met Office was simply written on the back of the observation sheet.

Meteorological Observations taken at Fort Enniskillen, Sligo											
Year	Month	Day	Time	Temp.	Wind	Cloud	Pressure	Humidity	Rain	Remarks	Observer
1876	Jan	16	9 a.m.	-19.1	W	100	30.0	100	0.0	Clear	Anna Doberck
1876	Jan	16	9 p.m.	-23.3	W	100	30.0	100	0.0	Clear	Anna Doberck

Extra Observations (if any)											
Wind	Cloud	Weather	Barometer	Thermometer	Hygrometer	Barometer	Thermometer	Hygrometer	Barometer	Thermometer	Hygrometer
W	100	Clear	30.0	10.0	100	30.0	10.0	100	30.0	10.0	100

Observations were made at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. every day.

‘The Female Touch’

Anna Doberck

The observations illustrated here were taken by a woman of Danish origin, named Anna Doberck. Anna’s name appears on the Markree records from 1874 to 1876. Her records are distinctive because she draws the prescribed weather symbols in the notes field more frequently than other observers. For example,

▲ for hail * for snow

Why was a lady of Danish origins recording observations in County Sligo in 1876?

Anna Doberck’s brother, William, was an acclaimed astronomer and he was in charge of the Markree Observatory from 1874 to 1882. Anna assisted William at the observatory.

It was while the Dobercks were at Markree that our record lowest air temperature was recorded; that is -19.1°C (-2.3°F) on 16th January 1881.



William Doberck



Anna Doberck drew prescribed symbols to record weather information.											
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‘Typhoon Annie’

The Hong Kong Connection

In 1882, the Dobercks left Markree for Hong Kong, when William was appointed Director of the new Hong Kong Observatory.

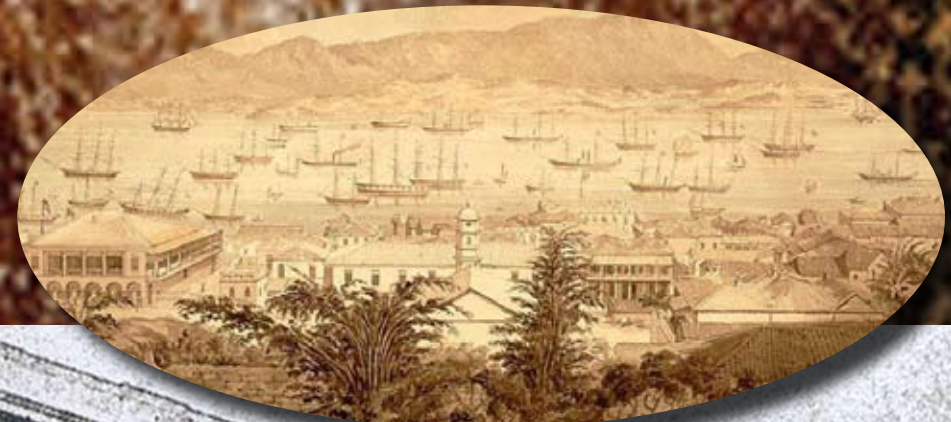
Ten years later, in 1892, Anna was appointed Assistant Meteorologist in the same institution - only after lengthy negotiations with the Colonial Office.

Anna’s appointment was noted in the journal *Nature* Vol. 46 (108) 1892, where she was misidentified as Dr. Doberck’s daughter.

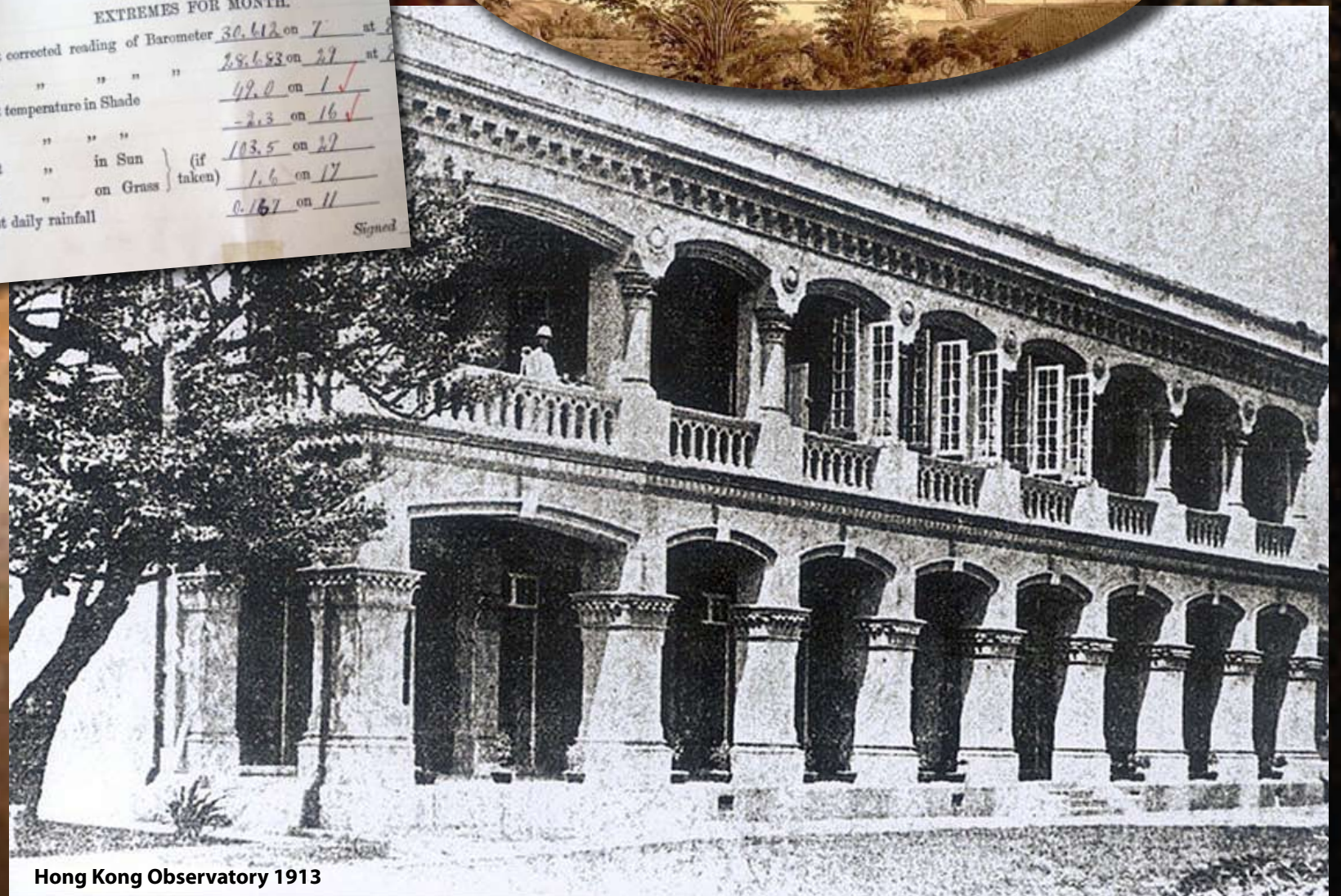
Anna remained at the Hong Kong Observatory until her retirement in 1915. Part of her role in Hong Kong was to visit ships in port to excerpt weather observations from their navigation log books. Because of the nature of her work, she was nicknamed ‘Sampan Annie’ or ‘Typhoon Annie’.

The lowest air temperature ever recorded in Ireland was -23.3°F, 16th January 1881.

EXTREMES FOR MONTH											
27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38
Highest corrected reading of Barometer 30.612 on 7											
Lowest " " " 30.612 on 17											
Highest temperature in Shade 51.0 on 16											
Lowest " " " 41.5 on 17											
Highest " in Sun (if taken) 1.6 on 17											
Lowest " on Grass 1.6 on 17											
Greatest daily rainfall 0.167 on 11											



View of Hong Kong Harbor, 1860-1870. Marciano Antonia Baptista (1828-1896).



Hong Kong Observatory 1913