

OPENING REMARKS

W. J. Luyten (Chairman of the Organizing Committee) – As I am the one who was asked by the Executive Committee of the IAU to organize this Symposium – No. 42, on White Dwarfs – it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all on this occasion.

First of all I should like – and I am sure I am speaking for all of you – to express our deep appreciation to the Court of the University of St. Andrews for their permission to hold our meetings here and especially for their generosity in making all the detailed arrangements.

And now I should like to introduce Professor Norman Gash, Vice-Principal of the University, who will formally open our proceedings.

N. Gash (Vice-Principal of the University of St. Andrews.) – Ladies and Gentlemen: My task this morning is simple, and I think I can make it brief. It is, of course, merely to welcome you to St. Andrews, to the town and to the University. It is always a pleasure for us, as I suppose for most Universities, to act as host to such a distinguished gathering of international scholars as you are. I think we should always remember that Universities are one of the oldest internationals although perhaps they do not always publicize themselves as such.

When it was first proposed to the University Court last year that this particular Symposium should be held in St. Andrews, I know there was very great pleasure among all its members. We did appreciate it as a compliment not only to the University but, in particular, to the University Observatory and to its Director, Professor Stibbs. Although St. Andrews is a small University, perhaps because it is a small University, I think we have always been particularly proud of our special astronomical tradition. It is one of the things that sets us apart from other small Universities.

It is true, of course, that in its present form our Department of Astronomy is of relatively recent date. A separate Department only began in 1938; the modern Observatory building was only started in 1941, and the Chair itself was only created in 1950. But the tradition of Astronomy in St. Andrews goes back 300 years to the great figure of James Gregory, the contemporary and friend of Sir Isaac Newton. Had he been a member of a larger University, had he been the citizen of a larger country, I think perhaps James Gregory would be more widely known than he is. But by any reckoning, I think he was a remarkable man. He was the first incumbent of the Regius Chair of Mathematics founded in 1668 by Charles II. He had already in his *Optica Promota* in 1663 put forward suggestions for a two mirror combination for a reflecting telescope which in many respects anticipated, or at least preceded, alternative arrangements put forward five years later by Newton, and before similar proposals a few years after that by Cassegrain. Gregory built and equipped a University Observatory in St. Andrews which has now, I fear, disappeared, and we can only

show you the site and some of the instruments that he used. But it is important, and I think certainly a matter of note for historians, that in this small town and small University, in the second half of the 17th century, Gregory in St. Andrews was founding an Observatory at the same time as Louis XIVth was founding his Observatory in Paris and before Charles II founded the English Observatory at Greenwich in 1675. And in Scotland, particularly in St. Andrews, we feel that Gregory was part of that great European intellectual renaissance, indeed, intellectual revolution particularly in the fields of Mathematics and Astronomy, that marked the second half of the 17th century. There are many marks of Gregory's life and career still to be found in the University. Some of his instruments, for example, are still preserved. If you go to Upper Parliament Hall in the University Library, you will see the shell, if not the lens, of one of Gregory's telescopes, the bracket that he used and the wall clock, now transformed into a long case clock, that he is believed to have used in making his observations and calculations. The name itself is preserved in our Second Chair of Mathematics, and it is also commemorated in the Cassegrain Schmidt Telescope which was built in St. Andrews after the war, very largely in the Observatory and which was, for a time, the largest telescope of its kind in Great Britain.

But, after that efflorescence in St. Andrews, the study of Astronomy undoubtedly declined in the 18th century. Politics and poverty are two great enemies of Universities, and St. Andrews suffered from both for some 150 years after Gregory left St. Andrews. The study of Astronomy did not revive in any real sense until the 19th century under the wing of the Chair of Mathematics, and the full recovery was reserved until our own time. But the tradition and the name of Gregory has never disappeared from the University, and no one or very few visitors who go over Parliament Hall can fail to be reminded of him. But, of course, tradition is only of value when it promotes and encourages the future, and in St. Andrews we look forward with confidence to the future of Astronomy in this University. Particularly, I think, we are looking forward to the next five years when the completion of the Anglo-Australian Telescope is clearly going to widen the opportunities for observational Astronomy and during which we hope that at least some of the equipment used on that telescope will originate from work in progress in St. Andrews.

And now I think I must not detain you any longer. You have your work to do, and I am only acting as a hindrance to it. All I want to add to what I have said is that we do wish you a very profitable Symposium. We also hope that you will enjoy your stay here. I know that arrangements have already been made for you to see other parts of Scotland but we hope that in your zeal to see the Highlands you will not forget to explore the more miniature attractions of St. Andrews, and that you will see as much as possible of the University while you are here.