

Short Notes

Atlantic Observatory

TENERIFE has finally been ruled out as a site for the proposed British observatory in the Northern Hemisphere on political grounds. The current state of tension between Britain and Spain over Gibraltar has forced the government to advise the optical astronomy community of this fact.

Visibility tests are at present going on in other non-Spanish islands in the Atlantic, but it seems that it will be several months before these are completed. Once a site is decided on, the next decision will be whether or not the 98-inch Isaac Newton telescope at Herstmonceux should be moved to this site or whether a new telescope or telescopes should be built.

Dr Alan Hunter, the next Director of the Royal Greenwich Observatory, said this week that the cost of moving the telescope would be an "appreciable fraction of the cost of building a new one". Dr Hunter does not favour moving the telescope unless it proves impossible to raise the funds to build a new instrument.

The Science Research Council last year asked Professor Margaret Burbidge to investigate the costs and other benefits of moving the telescope. So far, the council has not received any official report.

Once a suitable site is found for the observatory the Science Research Council will be asked to finance the building of three telescopes, one of 1 metre, one of 2 metres and one of 4 metres. The total cost of the project has been estimated to be £15 million.

BA diversifies

THE British Association for the Advancement of Science is continuing its efforts to become more relevant. As a prelude to the association's annual meeting to be held at the University of Stirling next year a series of meetings will take place which will discuss the influence of science on the life of the nation. The first will be in November.

The British Association has often been accused of concentrating all its efforts into producing an annual meeting but doing little else for the remainder of the year. This is in the process of being remedied, particularly with the recent appointment of Dr Magnus Pyke as both chairman of the council and as secretary of the association. Dr Pyke is most keen for the association to diversify its activities.

The first of these meetings will take place at the University of Dundee, when the impact of the current upsurge in geological sciences on society will be discussed. Perhaps the most relevant

session at this meeting will be that in which the competitive position of coal with respect to oil and gas will be discussed. Mr A. M. Clarke the Deputy-Chief Geologist with the Coal Board will take place in the discussion as well as an economist, Professor C. Blake and a Civil Engineer, Professor A. R. Cusens, both from the University of Dundee.

Shining Brightly

Two announcements last week confirm that the 154-inch telescope to be built at Siding Spring in Australia is both on schedule and that it will be the most accurate telescope in the world when built.

Reyrolle Parsons has completed the three and a half year process of grinding and polishing the primary mirror for the telescope and it is now on its way to New South Wales where it will be installed at the end of this year.

The Department of Trade and Industry in a back slapping announcement said that three engineers at the National Engineering Laboratory at Glasgow had developed a new calibration technique which will ensure that the 20 tons of telescope, which will have to be rotated, will be capable of "more precise star tracking than any other major astronomical telescope in the world".

The techniques developed by both Reyrolle Parsons and the National Engineering Laboratory might again prove useful to astronomers. If funds are made available to build a British observatory on some Atlantic island, then the exercises will not be very expensive one-off operations, for the plans are, as we report elsewhere on this page, to build three telescopes in the proposed observatory.

Pasteur Problems

THE Pasteur Institute in France has been shaken recently by a serious financial crisis. Professor Jaques Monod, the director, has announced that the institute has been forced to close several research units and thirty scientists and a hundred technicians have been dismissed.

The announcement has, not unexpectedly, caused an uproar in France, for in addition to this announcement, Professor Monod revealed that the institute had requested financial support from the government. This State support would go towards financing the services which the institute provides to the community in public health and, for financing immunology and microbiology.

Directors of the institute are, however, keen to maintain the independence

of the foundation and so only partial help from the government has been asked. The hope is that more money can be earned in the next few years by increasing the turnover obtained from the institute's production services.

Curien for Aigrain

PROFESSOR Pierre Aigrain has been replaced as Deputy-General for Scientific Research in France by Dr H. Curien who was until recently Director of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). As reported recently in *Nature* (244, 64; 1973) Professor Aigrain, after a five year term as advisor to the French Government, took up a teaching position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Dr P. Gregory has replaced Dr Curien at the head of CNRS.

Whiter than white

TAKEN at face value, the statistics published in the Procter and Gamble annual report on the use of soap per person in Britain, can be taken to imply that the Briton of today is almost five times cleaner than his great great grandparents were in the early 1840s.

At that time each person used on average 6½ pounds of soap a year. In 1871 this had risen to 10½ pounds, while in 1911 each Briton was disposing of 18 pounds every year. Today 29 pounds a year of soap are used per person for all domestic and industrial purposes.

Surprisingly the increase in use of soap is almost linear and not exponential. Has the soap industry been living in an unreal world for the past hundred years?

Northern Lights

LAST week an experimental campaign started to investigate the auroral sub-storm phenomena at various stages of development and altitude.

The plan is to launch five Skylark rockets from Norway's Andoya rocket range. The first of these was launched last week and the other four will be launched in conjunction with ten Aerojet Petrel rockets.

Nineteen experiments are to be carried aboard the Skylarks and twelve on the Petrels. The chief objective will be to examine the magnetic sub-storms which occur near the Arctic Circle.

The research is sponsored by the Science Research Council and is managed by the Radio and Space Research Station. The experiments have been prepared by groups from the Universities of Birmingham, Sheffield, Southampton and Sussex, University College, London, the Radio and Space Research Station and the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden.