

2004: the year of the transit

by Valerie & Andrew White

The highlight of 2004 was the transit of Venus in June. To prepare ourselves for the event, in April we visited Much Hoole in Lancashire, to see the church where Jeremiah Horrocks was clerk, and nearby Carr House where it is assumed he was a tutor to the children of the house, and from where he was the first to view a transit of Venus in 1639. The east window of the church has a stained glass depiction of Horrocks viewing the transit and also, in another window in



Jeremiah Horrocks observes the transit of Venus in 1639. Stained glass window in Much Hoole church, Lancashire.

the left hand side, there is a roundel which was installed to commemorate the transit of Venus in 1874. Earlier in 2004 the local school designed a new roundel, to commemorate the 2004 transit, which has been installed in a symmetrical position in the same window. This new roundel design was used as the logo for the many events that Much Hoole Church organised during 2004, especially around June. The clock on the outside of the church, dated 1859, was erected in memory of Horrocks and has an inscription to this effect around it.

The weekend before the transit, the church held a flower festival on the theme of Jeremiah Horrocks and the planets. The flower arrangements were superb, with a number portraying the Sun with Venus in transit. On the same afternoon we visited Astley Hall, near Chorley, not

far from Much Hoole, as we knew it has a painting of Horrocks observing the transit, but it was closed that day, so we just took a photo of their adverts for observing the transit on June 8 and their play 'Much Hoole about Nothing'. Unfortunately the play was already fully booked, so we were unable to see it.

For the transit itself we flew to Egypt (Sinai) with Explorers Tours and had a perfectly clear sky to view the event, although it was very hot. We took a Meade ETX90 and a Coronado Maxscope 40 H-alpha telescope with us. Val viewed through the ETX with a solar filter, and Andrew viewed through the H α . We wanted to view ingress and egress rather than photograph them, and we recorded the times of ingress and egress. It was interesting to note that Andrew saw the ingress in H α about 45 secs before Val did in white light, and similarly egress was about 45 seconds after in H α . We have put a fuller report and the timing results on our web site www.vanda.eclipse.co.uk.

We visited Astley Hall the weekend after returning from Egypt, to see the painting of Horrocks observing the transit and the exhibition on Horrocks and his observations that they had on display throughout 2004. Another painting of Horrocks is owned by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, so in July we went there and eventually found the painting, but not in the Art Gallery (where the staff didn't know anything about it), but in the Astronomy Gallery in the Museum next door.

To further add to our transit experience, in August we travelled the ten miles to Salford, to find where Jeremiah Horrocks' friend William Crabtree lived and observed the 1639 transit. We found the blue plaque in the area that he is reputed to have observed from (the plaque is on someone's garden wall). We also found the house where Crabtree lived (Ivy Cottage), which was actually up for sale, and the estate agent's web site had



Roundels in Much Hoole Church to commemorate the Venus transits. *Left*, erected in 1874; *right*, added in 2004.

some interesting photos of the present interior and garden of the cottage. An additional point of interest was that the nearby road was called Priory Grove but its road sign said 'Priory Grove – late Crabtree Croft'. We were not quite so successful in trying to see the painting of Crabtree observing the transit, which is in the Great Hall in Manchester Town Hall, as tours are only during a weekday and by prior arrangement, and we had called on a Saturday.

To round off the transit year, we called at Tahiti in November, on the way to a holiday in New Zealand. We went up to Venus Point, where Captain Cook and astronomer Charles Green observed the transit of Venus in 1769. There is, of course, nothing remaining of



Lighthouse and monument at Venus Point, Tahiti.

the observatory that Cook erected, but we knew there should be a monument there. We eventually found a monument which we assumed was the one commemorating Cook's observation, but it had no plaque to say what it was. Later we found out from a tour guide that there had been a plaque but it had been stolen a few years ago and never replaced. But we did find a picture on the internet of a close-up of the lost plaque in situ on the monument, which confirmed that we had found the right place. 📍

