

## Institute of Physics – L&SE Branch – Retired Members Section

### The King's Observatory (TKO), Kew and Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club Wednesday 10 November 2021

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This meeting has been organised by Stewart Coulter



**DESCRIPTION:** The visit was originally to be combined with Kew Gardens but their winter hours and the cost to non-members, not to mention the 25 min walk between the two sites led to a more leisurely combination. Now joined with leisure time in the Mid-Surrey Golf Clubhouse where we have lunch booked (3 courses ~£25 + drinks) for 13:15. We can use their car park and will meet in the Haslam Lounge from 11:00, departing at 11:40 for TKO nearby. Turn right at Reception, the Haslam Lounge is on your left, refreshments will be available. After 18 months we need time to catch up so this should be quite a

social event with a tour of TKO the focus. The 12:00 tour allows members to travel from afar.

**THE KING'S OBSERVATORY** at Kew is an observatory of significant historical importance. It was built by King George III to observe the 1769 transit of Venus. The king had responded to the Royal Society's *Memorial* asking for financial help towards Cook's expedition, granting £4000. Cook was dispatched to the S Pacific to increase the parallax required from the various observations around the world to determine Venus's distance, hence all distances in the Solar System. His "discovery" of Australia was incidental.



A plaque within commemorates the event (pictured here with Robbie Brothers, leaseholder, the building is Crown Property). The black drop effect where the disc of Venus clung to the Sun's limb led to uncertainties of a few dozen seconds in Cook's timings of ingress and egress, yet at Kew, all 7 observers agreed with the King to the second! World-wide results were reduced by Lalande in Paris to provide a value of the Sun's distance to within 2.2% of today's. The observatory's construction included a rotatable cupola dome with slit, so common today. Remarkably, this is the world prototype. And another first - the first astronomical observations using a telescope were made on the other side of the river, a few 100m away in Syon House Gardens (Thomas Harriot 1609, Galileo was 1610).

**HISTORY:** King George III was the first monarch to be given a formal scientific education, this was the height of the enlightenment after all and many will recall the King George collection of instruments at the Science Museum, no longer displayed. The National Physical Laboratory was established at the Kew Observatory in 1900, principally for geomagnetic observations and from 1910 it housed the Meteorological Office when they kite marked instruments on site. The Met Office closed the observatory in 1980. More recently it was the HQ of Autoglass (!) but since leased to Robbie Brothers, a Hong Kong businessman who has more recently restored it to a private residency. When in 2017 an astronomy friend spotted it in a letting agency in Richmond (at £35k a month!) he arranged a private view with Robbie Brothers himself showing us around. Five of us were the first *ever* members of the general public to visit, a great privilege. It is now open a few weeks a year, such openings provide tax breaks. Further detail to be found at <https://www.kingsobservatory.co.uk> .

**TIMETABLE:** Visits are limited to 10 persons, and we have taken the full 12:00 tour this day. After the visit, we return to the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club where we have lunch booked for 13:15. Please check their dress code which I will reduce to not wearing denim. A skirt denied us entry last time.

<https://www.rmsgc.co.uk/>

<https://www.rmsgc.co.uk/uploads/midsurrey/File/RMSGC%20Dress%20Code.pdf>

11:00+ Meet at Haslam Lounge in the Golf Club (right at reception, then on your left)

12:00 Visit of observatory (a 10 minute walk away)

13:15 Club lunch in the Viscount Room upstairs

**COSTS:** £10 plus lunch and transport.

### **GETTING THERE:**

The Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club is at TW9 2SB – Entrance off the A316.

Access is by way of the shared driveway with TKO, we have permission to use their car park.

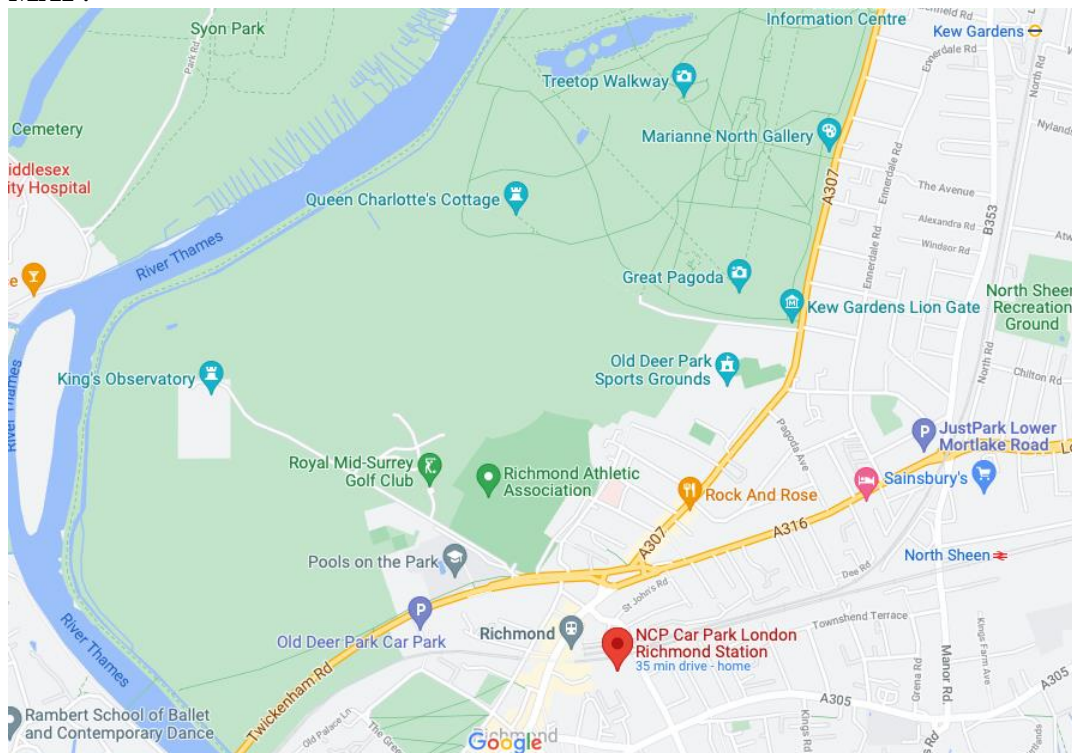
### **TRANSPORT:**

By Train: Underground District Line, Overground from Waterloo and Clapham Junction to Richmond Station (allow for a 20 minute walk from the Station). There is no access from the Riverside Path.

By Bus: No. 490 to Pools on the Park which is located at the entrance to the driveway.

Please observe the Golf Club's warning signs showing direction of play, [and their dress code!]

### **MAP:**



**CONTACTS:** Before the day: Stewart Coulter at [stewartcoulter.rems@gmail.com](mailto:stewartcoulter.rems@gmail.com) or on 07747 800837  
On the day, including late arrivals, please contact Hugh Deighton on 07712 563360

**PAYMENT:** £10 cash on the day to Stewart.