

Timeline of the Fernley Observatory

We hope you will enjoy reading about the history of this stunning asset to Southport's heritage and appreciate how the lives of important personalities are interwoven, whether philanthropists, enthusiastic amateurs or the landed gentry.



Joseph Baxendell Snr



John Fernley

1815

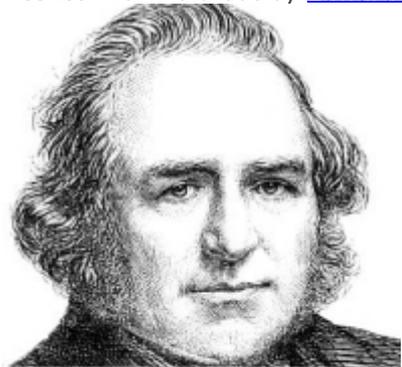
[Joseph Baxendell](#), Southport's first future meteorologist born.

1856

[John Fernley](#) moved to [Southport](#), setting up home at "Clairville" in [Lulworth Road](#), currently the site of a development of flats bearing the same name.

1868

Hesketh Park laid out by [Edward Kemp](#) to a design by [Sir Joseph Paxton](#)



Joseph Paxton



Thomas Cooke

1869

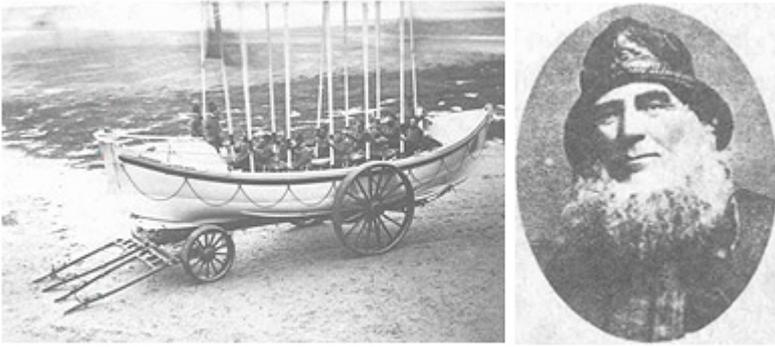
Self-taught optical engineer [Thomas Cooke](#), founder of the firm [Thomas Cooke and Sons of York and London](#), manufactured the 6" telescope you see today.

1871

Joseph Baxendell was appointed as the first Superintendent of the new meteorological station in Hesketh Park. The first set of weather instruments was funded by local philanthropist John Fernley to Baxendell's requirements, and the meteorological station was named the Fernley Observatory. It was located adjacent to the current position of the astronomical observatory. Baxendell pursued his career while immersing himself in his interest in astronomy in a quiet and unobtrusive way, using a telescope at [Crumpsall](#) Hall in Manchester for the purpose. His first contribution to the [Royal Astronomical Society](#) was made in 1849. He was enrolled as a fellow of that society in 1858, becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1884, but the greater and more important portion of his work was contributed to the [Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society](#), of which he had been a member since January 1858. Of his astronomical observations, perhaps the most important are those embodied in various catalogues of variable stars.

1873

John Fernley, who was also the donor of Southport's first lifeboat and several other significant projects within the town, died. The lifeboat was named "[Eliza Fernley](#)" after his wife.



The Eliza Fernley & Coxswain Charles Hodge, 1874

1877

The scientific philanthropist Sir Thomas Sebastian Bazley (1829-1919), [2nd Baronet of Hatherop, Gloucestershire](#) donated the Cooke telescope and the timber structure housing it to Joseph Baxendell, who by then was renowned in the field of astronomy. The entire timber structure and telescope were moved from Gloucestershire at Sir Thomas' expense to the back garden of Baxendell's home at [14 Liverpool Road, Birkdale](#), whereupon Baxendell renamed his house "The Observatory". The Bazley fortune had been made by the 1st Baronet in Manchester from cotton spinning.

1886

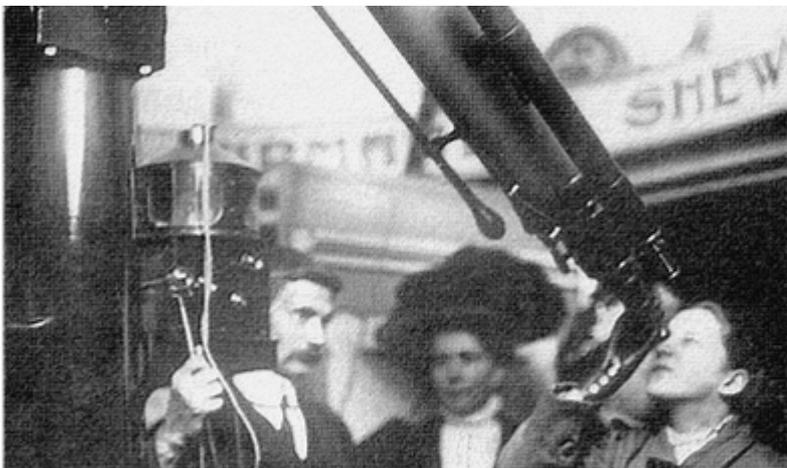
The "Eliza Fernley", was lost while attending [the rescue of the barque "Mexico"](#) off [Birkdale](#). 27 lifeboat crew from Southport and [Lytham](#) were drowned, their bodies being laid out in the coach house of the [Palace Hotel](#) in Birkdale, subsequently renamed the "[Fishermen's Rest](#)", which still exists today.

1887

Joseph Baxendell died, to be succeeded as superintendent of the meteorological station in [Hesketh Park](#) by his 18-year old son, Joseph Baxendell Jnr, whose main interest was meteorology rather than astronomy. He later became a Fellow of the [Royal Meteorological Society](#) and Vice President of the Society in 1922.

1901

The complete Observatory was moved to Hesketh Park from the back garden of the Baxendell family home. It was erected on the brick lower structure funded by the winding-up of the estate of the late John Fernley, at a cost of £100. It was designated the "Baxendell Astronomical Observatory" and given to the then Southport Corporation, now [Sefton MBC](#). Regular open days for the public, schools and observations continued into the late 1930s. [Queen Victoria](#) died in January of this year.



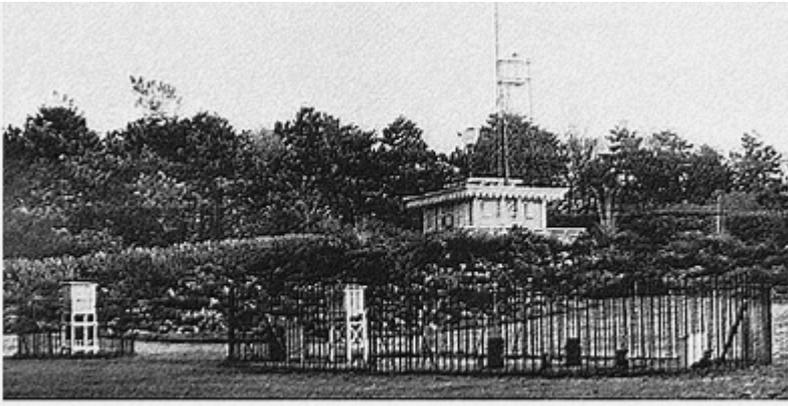
Early use of the Observatory, 1901

1919

Annual reports of Southport's meteorological data were circulated by the [Air Ministry](#) until the 1940s

1936

Joseph Baxendell Jnr wrote a book entitled "The Climate of Southport"



The Fernley Meteorological Observatory, 1936

1938

Joseph Baxendell Jnr retired. Due to tree growth in Hesketh Park impairing valid data collection, the Meteorological station was later moved out to [Crossens Pumping Station](#), then subsequently to two other locations in Southport. Current weather information for our area now comes from [Crosby Coastguard Station](#)

1950s

The Observatory was used by [Southport Technical College](#) and it was still used into the 1960s by some members of the Southport Astronomical Society who were also Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society.

1960s

During this period [Southport Technical College](#) were given responsibility for the care and use of the Observatory and for three years it was opened to the Public for three evenings a week during the winter months. Changes of staff caused this to eventually cease.

1969

The [Cooke](#) telescope's 100 year anniversary coincides with the first manned Moon landing, with [Neil Armstrong](#) and [Buzz Aldrin](#) being the first to walk on the moon. ([Apollo 11](#))

1986

Sefton MBC Education Department took action to recreate interest in Astronomy and arranged a public meeting resulting in the re-launch of the [Southport Astronomical Society](#). A member of the Society, who was also on the technical staff of Sefton MBC, took on the task of the upkeep of the Cooke telescope. School visits were resumed and became a regular occurrence until funds were exhausted.

1990

A decline in activity became inevitable resulting from the age of the building, rain and damp created difficulties in using the Observatory, and Sefton's Education Department ceased to use the facility.

2008

[English Heritage](#) designated the Observatory as a Grade II listed building. A Heritage Lottery Grant was used to refurbish the Observatory, which turned out to have been to an inadequate standard of workmanship, with problems arising within 2 months. The refurbishment company from Glasgow went into liquidation.

2014

Using the proceeds from our first Open Day, sponsored by the Hesketh Park Heritage Group, the [Fernley Observatory Heritage Group](#) was an initiative started by three concerned local residents to raise public awareness of the heritage of the Observatory.

Our Group subsequently separated from the Hesketh Park Heritage Group and over the following two years in partnership with the Southport Astronomical Society and Sefton MBC, has worked tirelessly to help preserve and restore the Observatory for the benefit of its heritage and potential educational value.

2015

[Southport Lions](#) agreed to fund replacement doors at a cost of £1,600, the first work on the building in seven years.

2016

Sefton MBC agreed to fund restoration work only tendered by contractors with the required skills to carry out specialist heritage projects, and members of Southport Astronomical Society continue to make expert and highly skilled refurbishment to the telescope itself.