

STEAM TELESCOPE BUILT

(gleaned from the *Strange Implements* column of the London Times, April 31 1886)

by Biff Smooter

[Tenantsflay Abbey, Wilts]

Sir Chatworth Smythe-Bingle, a noted baronet of this county, has announced the surprising invention of a steam telescope. As interested readers who have been following the career of Sir Chatworth know, Snotty (to his Eton pals and close acquaintance) was reported last year as the inventor of the steam-powered toenail shear. Although it was unfortunate that it was tried on one of Sir Chatworth's young servants before the mechanism was completely adjusted, Snotty assured this correspondent that the plucky lad in question has been provided with sufficient ale money to keep him in a public house forever, and that he is rapidly becoming accustomed to the artificial lower limbs.

The telescope itself stands on a bluff on Fog Hill at the edge of his park, and while it has not seen sufficient clarity yet to actually view the heavens, it has been in existence only for 17 months and Sir Chatworth has hope of viewing the planets soon. When this correspondent arrived, Snotty immediately took me out to the site, which he has surrounded with poachers' traps. "Unscrupulous fellows trying to steal ideas from their betters, you know." Alas, Snotty forgot the precise placement of some of the traps, and by the time he reached the door, he looked much chewed. To his great fortune, none of the traps had sprung on vital organs or appendages, and other than give a promise to go to hospital directly after, he said he could continue.

The telescope is an impressive two feet in diameter, and the mounting is a very light 47 tons. The mirror was made of a type of bell metal that Sir Chatworth said reflected up to twenty per centum of the light striking it. It is covered with a haze of bubbles that Snotty said derived from the sloth of one of his workmen: "Boulder took to smoking at the wrong instant. I had the flames out and the lazy sluggard horse-whipped." Sir Chatworth promised that the mirror would be soon melted and re-poured, but as the stars had not yet shown themselves during the telescope's existence, there had been little impetus.

But it was not the telescopic optics that were new. This telescope is one of the miracles of steam! Snotty called it a "Going Toward" drive. When asked what that meant, he said that "the drive mechanically knows where all objects in the sky are." This correspondent confesses that he openly scoffed, causing Sir Chatworth to send a runner to the house to obtain the necessary eleven helpers. They began to stoke the boiler after pulling traps from their bodies, and in only three-quarters of an hour we had power.

The helpers had expressed consternation when asked to assist, and this correspondent had naturally thought that the powerful snapping devices surrounding the observatory held them back. But soon the true reason had been revealed. Snotty had underestimated the size of the observatory. The telescope swung in an arc 50 feet in diameter and the inside wall of the observatory was a circle 52 feet in diameter, leaving only a foot of clearance all around. That span would not in itself cause difficulty, but the gearing and the size of the motor were poorly chosen and the telescope turned too swiftly.

Sir Chatworth operated the Going Toward mechanism by inserting a pin in one of a multitude of holes in a sort of spherical globe. Presumably the position of the holes were matched by the globe of the Heavens. The pin held down two valves and two organ pipes bellowed forth. As he did this, he shouted "Wall!" which caused the workmen who lubricated, slipped pulleys, and shoveled coal to the great telescope to push themselves against the perimeter of the room and hold their breaths. Suddenly, the telescope turned with a sickening crack, too quickly to see it pass. One workman told me he had been in the Crimea and

made the celebrated charge with the Six Hundred, and he hadn't felt half the peril as when that telescope misses him by inches. "Has the same sound as a musket ball, guv, like a bee just missed yer ear!"

Snotty continued to operate the mechanism, pausing infrequently to let steam build, until the telescope snagged the clothing of an uncaredful groom. The last time this writer saw him, he was arcing up through the slit, towards where Andromeda would have been, had not Fog Hill been covered with grim clouds. Sir Chatworth yelled into the darkness "You had better not fall on one of my sheep!" A muffled bleat showed that order was little heeded. Mutton was served the next day.

Sir Chatworth invited me to return to the Abbey in two weeks, when he hoped to have gearing installed to slow the impossible speed of the Going Toward mechanism. I promised to come, but Sir Chatworth was suddenly killed during experimentation with his new steam nose-hair trimmer. The new baronet, Sir Snedley, has no interest in matters scientific, and has taken to traveling on the Continent.