

# Lens man backs work to revamp observatory

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By ROCHELLE WARRANDER

UNDERSTANDING astrophysics would be out of this world for most people, but for Garry Nankivell it is fun.

The internationally-respected telescope optical engineer, in New Plymouth at the weekend, said he enjoyed his work because it was mentally stimulating.

"It is a challenge. It's a bit difficult and damned hard work, but I think it is the greatest thrill to design something mathematically and then build it and have it come out how you predicted it would."

Mr Nankivell, from Lower Hutt, who helped build New Zealand's largest telescope at Mt John Observatory at Lake Tekapo, was in town for a fundraising lecture at the New Plymouth Astronomical Society. Before retiring, Mr Nankivell worked in the physics and engineering laboratory of what was formally the DSIR.

While in New Plymouth he was also looking at the condition of the observatory and telescope which the astronomical society says is in desperate need of an upgrade. "For a city the size of New Plymouth, the observatory is very good, but it has obviously had its golden days and the time has probably come to restore those golden days again," he said.

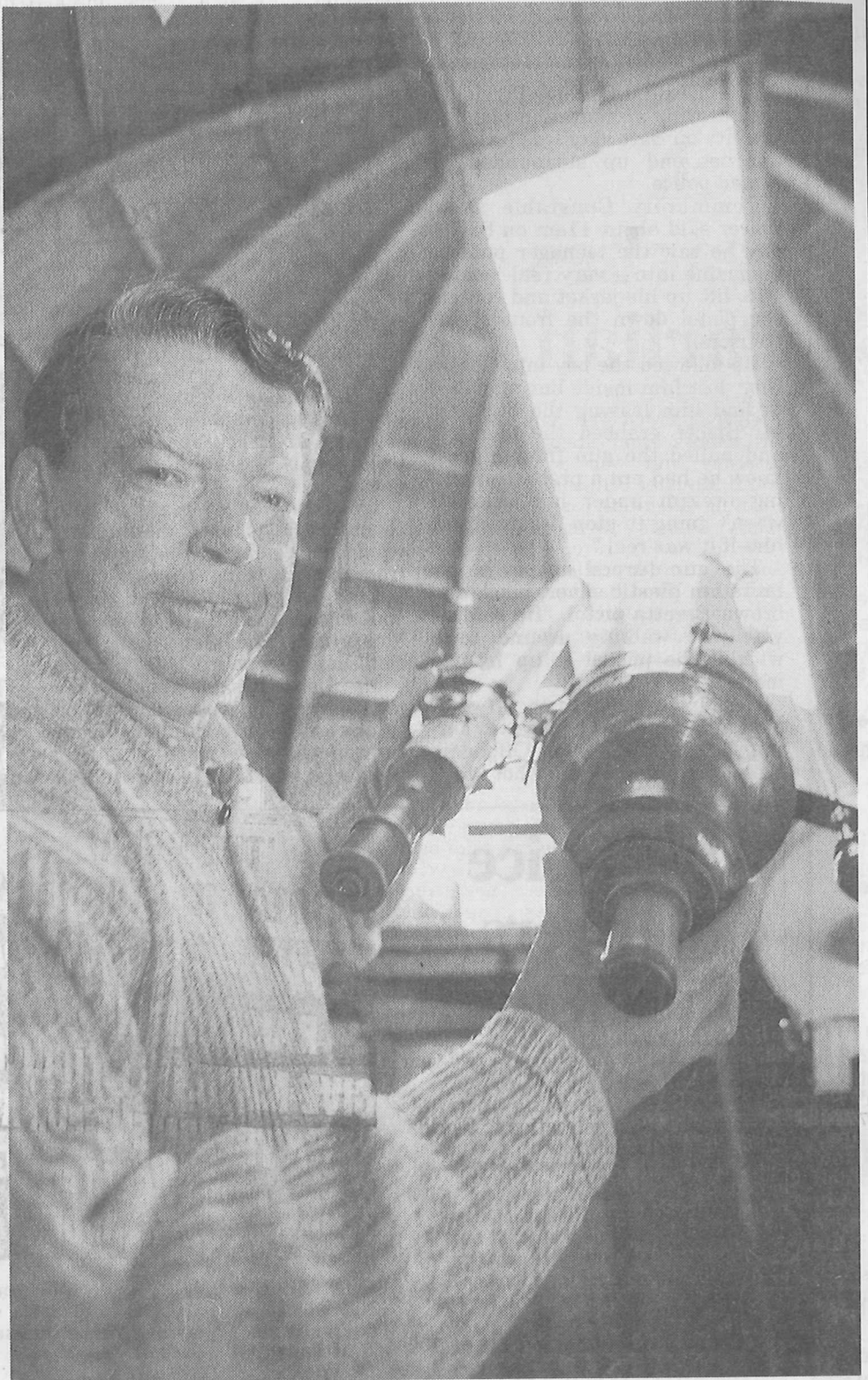
Mr Nankivell's latest mission was to design and help build a spectrograph with Canterbury University. He was in charge of the optical work on the instrument, which would be fitted to a telescope to enable astronomers to analyse the speed of stars approaching or receding from the earth.

He was also involved in a joint venture between Japan and New Zealand searching for "dark matter" in the universe.

"There is some matter out there that we can't detect because it doesn't give out light like normal stars do."

Although Mr Nankivell was interested in astronomy, the optics of a telescope appealed to the 69-year-old most.

"I'm a front of the house manager. I get the instruments to collect the light so the astronomer can use it."



**STAR WARS:** Internationally-respected Lower Hutt telescope optical engineer Garry Nankivell checks out the New Plymouth Observatory at the weekend.

Photo: MARK DWYER