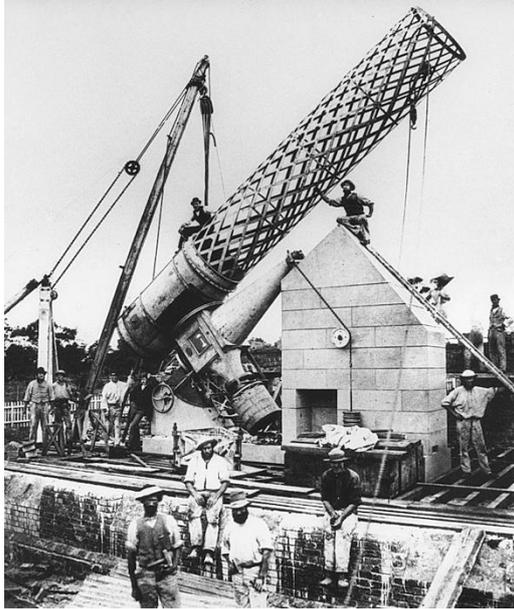


# The Great Melbourne Telescope Project

A Joint Venture by Museum Victoria, The Royal Botanic Gardens and the Astronomical Society of Victoria

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## 8. The Myth of Failure of the Great Melbourne Telescope



**Assembly of the Great Melbourne Telescope (GMT) at Melbourne Observatory, early in 1869.**

The Great Melbourne Telescope was housed at Melbourne Observatory in the GMT House from 1869 until 1944. It did not fulfill unrealistic expectations of great discoveries and is widely but wrongly regarded as a failure in this time.

In the 1830s the British scientist Sir John Herschel discovered about 1700 nebulae in the southern sky at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

The primary purpose of the GMT was set by the Royal Society of London as the re-examination of these nebulae.

For over a decade, astronomers Le Sueur, MacGeorge, Turner, Baracchi & Ellery diligently observed and sketched the southern nebulae. In relatively few cases they thought genuine changes had occurred, setting upper limits to the unknown distances of these nebulae. Part of this work was published in a report by Government Astronomer Robert Ellery in 1885. It includes sketches of only 49 objects out of the many hundreds observed.

The GMT was designed decades before nebulae were first photographed, but its photographs of the moon in the 1870s were considered of world class. When the moon prevented nebular work the GMT was a great success with public viewing.



**The moon photographed in 1873 by Joseph Turner using the GMT.**

The GMT in its original form was an innovative mechanical masterpiece and achieved its intended aims. It is unfortunate that much of its work is still unpublished. Recent historical research by the ASV has revealed that the financial crash of the 1890s left the GMT bereft of operating resources long enough for it to become obsolete. This and the lack of funding for modernisation were why it was laid up for decades before being rescued for its brilliant second career at Mt Stromlo.

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## The Great Melbourne Telescope Project Information Fact Sheet

This fact sheet is one of a series providing information on the GMT historical background, technical details of the instrument and the efforts to reconstruct this magnificent telescope for use by the public.

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