

SHA Trip to Ireland

13th-15th June 2026

Every year, the Society for the History of Astronomy holds a picnic at a site of astronomical historical significance. In recent years we have met in Bath, at the Moor Observatory in Preston, the Temple Observatory in Rugby, and at Jodrell Bank.

For 2026, we have decided to be a little more ambitious. We propose to hold our picnic at Birr Castle, County Offaly, the home of “The Leviathan of Parsonstown”, which was the largest telescope in the world for much of the nineteenth century.

We will be basing ourselves in Dublin. This gives us the opportunity to visit other sites over the course of a long weekend. We will be visiting Birr Castle on Saturday June 13th 2026; Newgrange on Sunday June 14th; with an optional visit to Dublin’s Dunsink Observatory on Monday June 15th.

Itinerary

Friday June 12th

Make your own way to Dublin.

There is plenty of accommodation in Dublin, but it is not cheap.

We have selected the Maldron Hotel (below), Kevin Street, as our base (I have stayed there before). This is a hotel south of the Liffey, close to the cathedrals.

You don’t have to stay here. There are other hotels and AirBnBs close to the Maldron, and plenty of places to eat (and drink!). There is also a small supermarket close to the Maldron where you can stock up on picnic food.



Saturday June 13th

We will hold our annual picnic at Birr Castle, in County Offaly, about 90 miles west of Dublin. Birr Castle is one of Ireland's leading tourist attractions; there is a historical castle and beautiful grounds. It is also the site of "The Leviathan of Parsonstown" (the former name for Birr), the telescope with which Lord Rosse discovered the spiral structure of galaxies.



Birr Castle

Itinerary:

8:00 – Coach leaves Maldron Hotel, Kevin Street

10:15 (approx.) – Coach arrives at Birr Castle

11:00 – Guided tour of Birr Castle and the Observatory (90 minutes)

13:00 – Picnic by the Great Leviathan Telescope

14:00 – Time to look round Birr Castle's extensive gardens.



16:00 – Return to Dublin

18:15 (approx.) – Coach arrives in Dublin

Sunday June 14th

The Boyne Valley, about 40 miles to the north of Dublin, is home to many neolithic sites. The most famous of these is Newgrange, which is renowned for its astronomical alignments, in particular at the winter solstice. Nearby Knowth is less well-known but still of great interest.

Itinerary:

09:00 – Board coach to Newgrange at the Maldron Hotel

10:00 (approx.) – Arrival at the Boyne Valley visitor centre

11:30 – 3-hour tour of Newgrange and Knowth (minibus travel between sites)

14:30 – Time to look round the visitor centre

16:00 – Coach leaves Newgrange

17:00 (approx.) – Arrive back in Dublin

The visitor centre has a café.



Newgrange



Knowth

Monday 15th June

The historical Dunsink Observatory lies on the outskirts of Dublin, about 8 miles from the centre. The observatory is now part of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS) and doesn't usually do tours. However, with the assistance of Alex Pratt, we have secured a tour.

We are aware that people might want to fly back to the UK on Monday afternoon, so we have hired a coach which will stop at Dublin airport (at around 12:30 PM) on its way back to Dublin city centre.

09:00 – Board coach to Dunsink at the Maldron Hotel

10:00 – 90-minute guided tour of the Dunsink Observatory

12:00 – Leave Dunsink and return to Dublin, via Dublin airport



How much will this cost?

What you need to arrange for yourself:

- Travel to/from Dublin. Ryanair, Aer Lingus and others fly from many UK airports at reasonable cost.
- Hotel costs. Accommodation in Dublin is expensive.
- All meals.
- Travel insurance.
- If you are visiting Dunsink, you will have to pay 10 Euros for a place on the guided tour via an Eventbrite Link which the observatory will set up, and we will pass on to you.

What we will arrange: (but you will have to pay for)

- Coach travel to/from Birr Castle.
 - Guided tour of Birr Castle and the Observatory.
 - Coach travel to/from Newgrange.
 - Guided tour of Newgrange and Knowth sites.
 - Coach travel to Dunsink, returning via Dublin airport.
- The total cost for all these will be around £110.

All guided tours have a strict limit of 25 people.

There has been a lot of interest in the tour, so we will take bookings on a first-come, first-served basis, and then keep a reserve list.

We are hiring 30-seater coaches, so there may be an opportunity for one or two people to travel to Birr and Newgrange and make their own way round the sites.

Mike Frost, SHA Meetings Secretary