

Whitmell, Charles Thomas (10 Jul. 1849-10 Dec. 1919), an English astronomer, mathematician and educationalist. He was born in Leeds, Yorkshire, where his father was an official of the Bank of England. At the age of 14 he was already corresponding with Michael Faraday and Professor John Tyndall. He graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, and carried out postgraduate experiments on highly refractive fluids at the Cavendish Laboratory under James Clerk Maxwell. In July 1879 he was appointed as one of Her Majesty's Assistant Inspectors of Schools, at first working in the area around Sheffield and in September 1883 was promoted to Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI) for the South Wales region, centred on Cardiff. He took part in campaigns for free, mixed education, recreative night-classes, and changes of the law to allow libraries, museums and other cultural facilities to open on Sundays. He also appeared on the platform at rallies demanding votes for women. In 1897 he was transferred to the post of HMI in Leeds. In both Cardiff and Leeds Charles Whitmell played a leading role in scientific societies. He became President of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society and before leaving Wales was nominated as the President of the Astronomical Society of Wales. On moving to Leeds he was elected President of the Leeds Geological Society and within a year was chosen unanimously as the President of Leeds Astronomical Society. At a national level, he was elected to the Council (and later vice-Presidency) of the British Astronomical Association (BAA), fellowship of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) and membership of the Astronomical Society of France.

Whitmell loved the mathematical analysis of unusual scientific problems. This trait dominated his published work. Such titles as 'the Maximum Possible Duration for a Total Solar Eclipse', the 'transit of the Moon across the Earth's disc as seen from Mars', 'Saturn visible through the Cassini Division', and 'a Martian Sundial' were typical. He also relished the observation and analysis of optical phenomena such as the Green Flash, halos, rainbows and mock suns. Through the popular journal, the *English Mechanic*, he provided detailed answers to a wide variety of queries on physics, astronomy and mathematics, posed by its readers. He also wrote hundreds of papers on astronomy for journals such as the *Journal of the BAA*, the *Observatory*, the *Monthly Notices of the RAS*, and the journals of the local scientific societies of which he was a member. For a time he was the editor of the *Journal & Transactions of Leeds Astronomical Society* and ensured that copies of the *Journal* were seen by amateur and professional astronomers around the world. Whitmell died unexpectedly, after a very brief bout of pneumonia, on 10th December 1919. Whitmell is buried with his wife, Lucy, at Lawnswood Cemetery in north Leeds. His epitaph reads simply: Chas. Thos. Whitmell, Astronomer (*Obit., MNRAS*, 80 (1920), 359-60).