

Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers

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Napier, John

Born Merchiston Castle near Edinburgh, Scotland, 1550

Died Edinburgh, Scotland, 4 April 1617

John Napier spent much time in devising methods of facilitating and shortening astronomical calculations

Napier was educated at Saint Andrews University and traveled on the Continent in his youth. Settling down at his family seat of Merchiston, he devoted his attention to many subjects, writing on theology and politics, and investigating various branches of science. His invention of logarithms with base e was announced in 1614. The invention was of great assistance to Johannes Kepler and made possible the rapid development of astronomy in the 17th century. He also created the mathematical tool known as Napier's bones.

(Local legend considered Napier to be a wizard.) Napier was married, widowed, and remarried. His descendants still hold the title of Lord Napier.

Selected Reference

Napier, John (1966). *The Construction of the Wonderful Canon of Logarithms*, translated by William Rae MacDonald. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall. (Facsimile reprint of the 1889 edition; includes a catalog of the various editions of Napier's works.)