

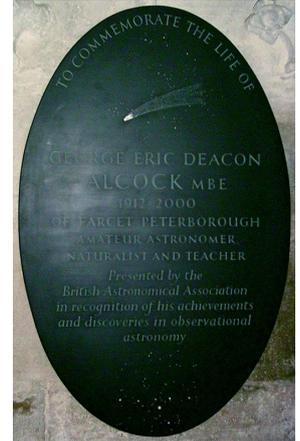


George Eric Deacon Alcock (1912–2000)

I first encountered George Alcock's name in 1967, when I read of his discovery of Nova Delphini. At about the same time, I met Roy Panther, who lived (and still lives) not far from me in Northampton. Roy had known George since the 1940s, and it was through him that I became acquainted with George. Roy carried out a considerable amount of observational and analytical work for the Meteor Section, and in the early 1950s he began sweeping for comets, eventually being rewarded with the discovery of comet 1980u, on Christmas Day. In 2001, George's brother John presented me with a few of George's notebooks and awards, though of course, all his astronomical records and drawings, his architectural and natural history drawings and paintings, and his other awards, such as his MBE, were retained by his family. At the meeting of *The Astronomer* in Basingstoke in October 2012 I presented a short talk about the items that I had received. The 7-minute video clip is available at:

<http://www.britastro.org/iandi/alcock.htm>

Bob Marriott, *Director*



The memorial in Peterborough cathedral, unveiled by Sir Martin Rees in April 2005.

55 BROADWAY,  
FARCET,  
PETERBOROUGH  
1996 January 24 PE7 3AT.

Dear Mr Marriott,

We are at present 'enjoying' persistent clouds, drizzle sleet and fog.

According to my records, which show, that since the end of November this has been the worst <sup>period</sup> for observing for over 40 years. Since Nov 30th I have managed 2 hours and 30 minutes.

As far as I know only one object has been discovered in that time, a comet low down in the dawn sky by another Japanese observer. It is surprising that I have not missed at least another comet and a couple of novae.

Such discoveries are usually made at times when observing here is impossible.

ⓑ

I cannot either, give you any news about my biography and when it is likely to appear. Mrs Williams of Leighton Buzzard is the author. She had heard nothing from the publishers for ~~several~~ months but around Christmas was forwarded a galley proof - so we think there is still a possibility it may appear before the turn of the century!!

What is of much more interest to me is that several complimentary accounts of my teaching career has appeared in the press. I didn't think that at my great age I should ever be remembered, as it is now 18 years since I retired at 65.

Now I consider myself an ancient replica of the human race. I will inform you at once when I consider my observing career is about to stop. Yours sincerely  
G E Alcock

1967 JULY 8-9.

Nova patrol began at 2215 U.T.

After sweeping upwards from the Galactic Centre through OPH, AQL to CYGNUS, a possible 5th magnitude nova was discovered in Delphinus at 2235 U.T. The star was at once recognised as a stranger.

Atlases Coeli and Eclipticalis were checked and the 1967 B.A.A. Handbook for Minor Planets. In the next 20 minutes no movement was detected.

At 2305 the discovery was ~~sent~~ phoned to M.P. Candy.

"Position RA  $20^h 40.0^m$ , Declination  $+18^\circ 55'$ , 5th magnitude, white".

The Hailsham-Heistmoneux region was cloudy so any confirmation was delayed. No observer was at the R.G.O.

At 0010/09 U.T. M.P. Candy replied, saying he had sent a telegram to the I.A.U. about a possible nova in Delphinus.

later tried to contact Lancaster-Brown at Beaconsfield 5536, no ~~reply~~ answer to call. (0030/09.)

Confirmation now awaited from other sources.

'After sweeping upwards from the Galactic Centre through OPH, AQL to CYGNUS, a possible 5th magnitude nova was discovered in Delphinus at 2235 UT.'

Date.	N O V A.				COMET.			Conditions.
	1967 Sweep No.	limits of Watch	Naked Eye	Binocs.	Night Number.	limits of Watch	B/T <sup>2</sup> Time.	
JULY 1.	91.	2235-0007	0 <sup>h</sup> 05 <sup>m</sup>	1 <sup>h</sup> 05 <sup>m</sup>	1307	2353-2358	0 <sup>h</sup> 05 <sup>m</sup>	Moderate sky, becoming poor before clouding over.
JULY 2.	92.	2153-2205	-	0 <sup>h</sup> 12 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Good sky, twilight. Increasing cloud.
JULY 3.		0000-0033	0 <sup>h</sup> 02 <sup>m</sup>	0 <sup>h</sup> 25 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Good sky, some passing cloud.
"	93.	2230-2300.	0 <sup>h</sup> 08 <sup>m</sup>	0 <sup>h</sup> 30 <sup>m</sup>	1308	2301-2337	0 <sup>h</sup> 35 <sup>m</sup>	Moderate sky, becoming poor.
"		2337-2340.	-	-	-	-	-	Much smoke. Clouded over.
JULY 8/9	94.	2215-2305	-	0 <sup>h</sup> 25 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Good sky. Smoke to the west.
9		2305-0030	0 <sup>h</sup> 10 <sup>m</sup>	0 <sup>h</sup> 15 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Patches of cloud at times. No comet sweeping attempted.
	*	At 2235 a suspect nova was discovered in Delphinus - 20 minutes after the start of the patrol.						Nova confirmed.
JULY 9	95.	2115-2315	0 <sup>h</sup> 10 <sup>m</sup>	0 <sup>h</sup> 40 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Excitement. Waiting for news of nova. Confirmed!! Clouding over.
JULY 10	96.	2115-2300	0 <sup>h</sup> 10 <sup>m</sup>	0 <sup>h</sup> 40 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Sky becoming quite good after bright twilight.
JULY 11	97.	2110-2155	-	0 <sup>h</sup> 30 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Very difficult. Banded ACu Cast. increasing.
JULY 12	98.	2140-2314	-	1 <sup>h</sup> 20 <sup>m</sup>	1309	2315-2332	0 <sup>h</sup> 17 <sup>m</sup>	Haze, little cloud. Not much good for comet work.
JULY 14		2336-2350	-	0 <sup>h</sup> 13 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	Twilight, clouded over.
JULY 14	99.	2145-2158	-	0 <sup>h</sup> 12 <sup>m</sup>	-	-	-	

'Excitement. Waiting for news of nova. Confirmed!!!'

July 17  
 Afternoon 4.30 p.m. Telephoned B.B.C. long conversation  
 about future Sky at Night Programmes.  
 Wanted me in London on Aug 18th.  
 Did not consent.  
 Patrick Moore will sing on Wednesday.

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July 17 21 15 U.T. Nova - no change. Strong twilight.  
 Cloud threatening. - B/T?

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John Harrison, BBC T/V, Villiers House, Haven Green,  
 London W.5.

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JULY 18. Received card from W. E. Fox, President of the B.A.A.

Also transcription of telegram received at R.A.S. :-  
 "Hambrrecht of Jena communicates the discovery by  
 Borchner, Friedmann and Pfau of a possible nova in  
 Hercules:

Equinox 1950  
 1967 June 29. R.A. 18<sup>h</sup> 17.5<sup>m</sup> Dec +24° 32'.  
 Photographic magnitude 16.  
 Invisible before May 11

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Wrote to B.B.C T/V cancelling any thought of participating  
 in "Sky at Night" programme of Aug 18.  
 Also informed Patrick Moore at Armagh.

An invitation to appear on The Sky at Night.

Telephone Numbers for astronomical observations.

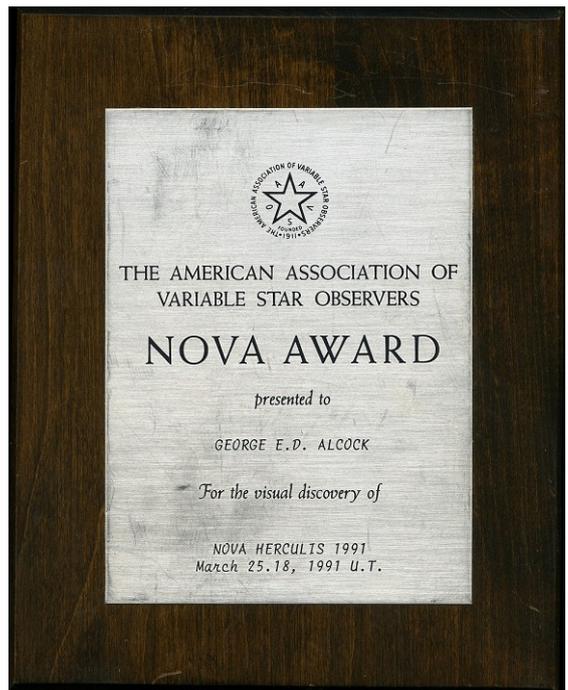
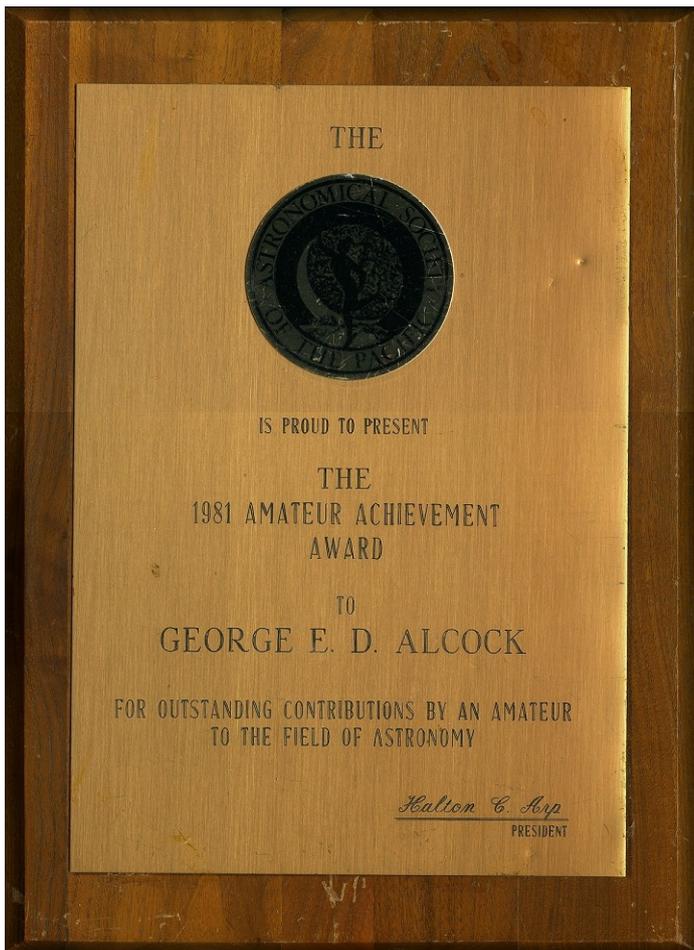
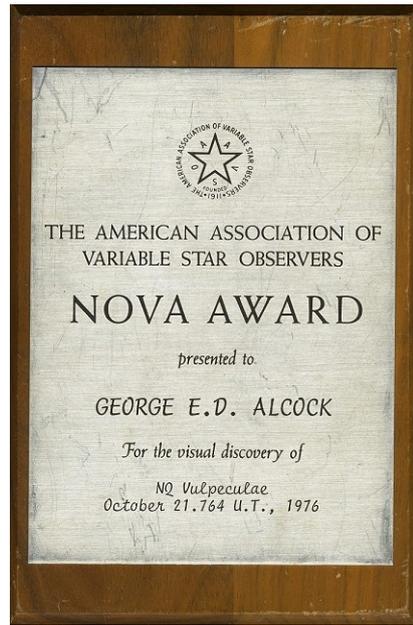
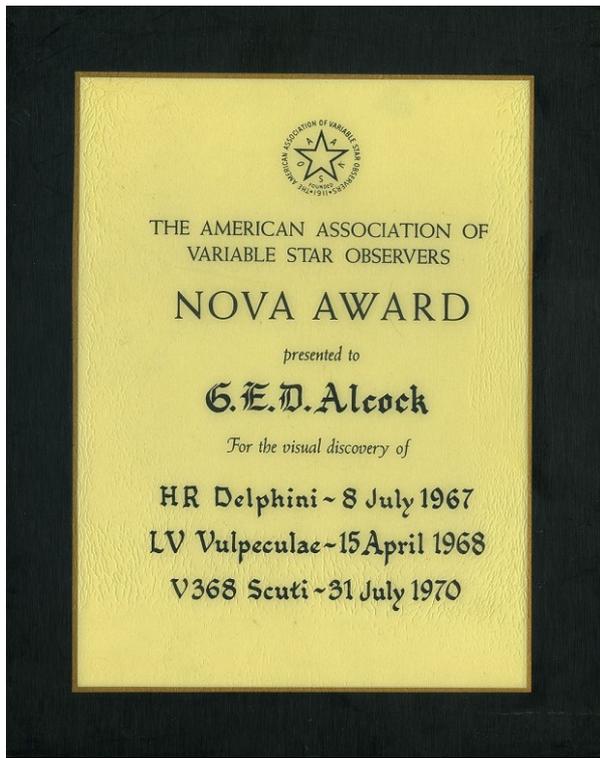
Comets. M. P. CANDY - Hellingley 409.

HERSTMONCEUX - R.G.O. - Herstmonceux 3174.  
 Extension some 'B'  
 Tapp 36 inch reflector.  
 let phone ring longer than usual.  
 Give R.A, Dec - Magnitude Colour.  
 Also give the observer Taxley 256.

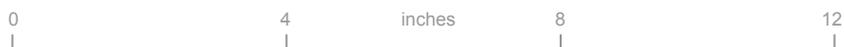
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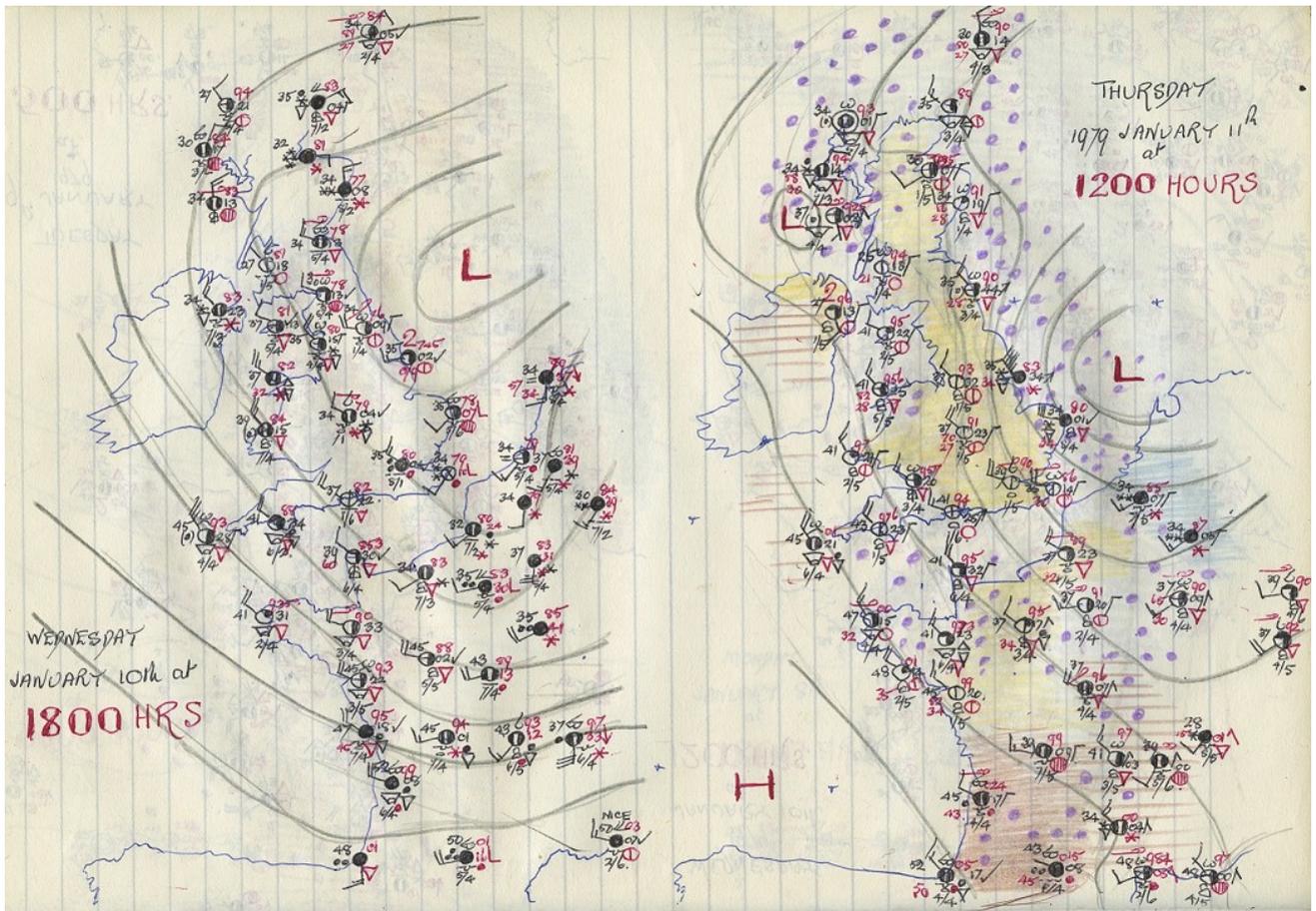
J. P. M. PRENTICE - Needham Market 338.  
 J. G. MERTON - Oxford 43330.  
 G. E. TAYLOR - Herstmonceux 3255.  
 E. H. COLLINSON - Witlesham 347.  
 W. E. FOX - Newark 4932.  
 H. B. RIDLEY - Godalming 2529.  
 J. R. SMITH - Knockholt 3150.  
 H. G. MILES - Coventry 62430.  
 P. LANCASTER-BROWN - Beaconsfield 5536.  
 M. J. HENDRIE - Bures 340.  
 D. SINDEN - Lemington, Newcastle ~~6746~~ 674560.  
 G. TAYLOR - (above).  
 B. A. CARTER - 021-747-8030.

Familiar names from different generations.



Four of the awards, from 1967 to 1991.





Pages from the meteorological journals.  
Two maps drawn every day for several years.

1980 OCTOBER							CLOUD							
Date / Time	WIND Dir, Ft	Vis	Percent Weather of	Temp	TYPE	AMT	Other Notes	Date / Time	WIND Dir, Ft	Vis	Percent Weather of	TYPE	AMT	
					Low High	Low Total						Low High	Low Total	
11 1500	040 3/8	20m	c	52	2 3 2 3	9+		14 0100	120 1	4m	0%	"	5 - - 10 10	
1700	030 46	15m	c	50	9-2 3 -	1/5 9		0540	110 1	4m	bca	39	5 - - 6 6	
1900	030 3/8	15m	bc	49	9 - - -	7 7		0700	110 2	4m	ca	40	5 - - 8 8	
	brilliant to SE with heavy distant thunder much distant SSE and SW								0900	120 3/3	3m	bc	50	5 - - 1 1
2000	030 4/8	15m	bc	47	9 6 3 7	9	Nova Sweep	1000	120 3	5m	bc	53	1 - - 1 1	
21 50	030 4/8	15m	c/tp	47	8 - - -	10 10	Rain Trace	1200	120 3	12m	bc	54	2 - - 6 6	
	Thunder from 1952-2018. R's passing east of station								1500	100 2	10m	b	52	1 4 - 1 1
	Report received of whirled after flash								1800	070 2	5m	b	"	5 - - 2 2
12 01 00	020 4/8	5m	bc/c	"	8 - - -	7 7		21 20	050 1-2	4m	b	43	5 - - Tr Tr	
0400	360 46	6m	bc/c	"	8 - - -	7 7		15 0150	050 1	400y	b+f	"	5 - - 2 2	
0500	350 4	4m	bc/c	"	4 8 - -	4 4		0500	050 1	3/4m	om	"	5 - - 10 10	
0600	340 36	3m	bc	47	4 8 - -	4 4		0600	060 1	1/2m	cm	40	5 - - 9+ 9+	
0800	340 3	4m	bc	49	4 - - -	3 3		0800	060 2	3m	ca	47	5 - - 9 9	
1000	340 3	5m	bc	49	5 - - -	2 2		1040	040 2	12m	bc	53	2 - - 3 3	
1100	330 3	10m	b	51	5 - - -	1 1	Rain NIL	1200	040 2	20m	ct	53	8-2 - - 8 8	
1200	360 3/4	12m	b	53	1 4 - -	Tr Tr		1350	030 2	10m	c	"	8 - - 9 9	
1500	020 3	12m	bc	57	3 6 - -	4 5	Nova Sweep	1500	040 1-2	25m	c	52	4/8 - - 9+ 9+	
1800	040 2	5m	bc	"	4 - - -	1 1	toe off	1740	030 1	20m	c	49	5 - - 9+ 9+	
2100	var 1	4m	bc	5	- - -	5 5	smoke pall	1900	060 2	20m	o	45	5 - - 10 10	
									2200	060 3	12m	o	"	5 - - 10 10
12 00 00	var 1	2m	bc	"	- - -	0 0		16 0100	040 36	6m	w	"	5 - - 10 10	
0300	150 1	400y	f+x	"	- - -	0 0	Nova attempt	0200	040 3/4	4m	ca	"	5 - - 10 10	
0600	150 1	500y	f+x	20	- - -	0 0	- fog	0500	040 46	2m	ca	44	5 2 - 10	
0800	160 1	500y	f+x	33	5 - - -	3 3		0620	040 4/8	1m	ca	44	5 2 - 7 10	
1000	160 2	4m	bc	"	1 - - -	Tr Tr		0730	030 4/8	1/2m	ca	6 2 - 9+ 10		
1300	170 1-3	7m	bc	53	2 - - -	4 4	Rain NIL	0900	030 4/8	3m	ca	44	6 2 - 9 10	
1530	160 2	5m	bc	57	2 5 - -	2 3		0900	030 4/8	3m	ca	44	6 2 - 9 10	
1800	150 2	6m	ca	"	7 - - -	0 0	boon!	1100	010 4/8	8m	ca	46	6 - - 10 10	
1900	150 2	4m	ca	46	- 7 - -	0 0		1300	360 3/4	10m	o	46	6 - - 10 10	
2200	120 2	5m	ca	"	5 - - -	10 10		1600	360 3	25m	o	"	6 - - 10 10	
									1800	350 1-2	15m	c/bc	"	5 - - 9 9

Wind, temperature, and cloud recorded up to a dozen times each day over many years.

1978.	
Aug 5 <sup>th</sup>	Onton Lakes. - 120 Canada geese flushed. c 20 Pochard. - E.B.
Aug 17 <sup>th</sup>	Horsey Toll, River Wene - 'a flotilla' of seven young Mallard.
Aug 18 <sup>th</sup>	Glassmoor Drain. (p.m.) At water's edge - House Sparrows, Yellow Wagtail, Greenfinch, Linnet, 2 Moorhen. Swallows circling. Heron heard calling. Woodpigeons. Farset p.m. many House Martins. Bonderbridge - one Swallow killed by traffic. Farset Fen - one little Owl in dead elm tree.
Aug 18 <sup>th</sup>	Anticyclone drifting very slowly ESE. At 1700hrs over Kent, NE France, Belgium, Holland and West Germany. Two Cold Fronts from very deep depression SSW of Iceland. The first over central Eire, the second front approaching west coast.
Aug 19 1130 hrs TN	The two Cold Fronts - the first over eastern Eire and Ulster, the second over central Eire. Both creeping slowly eastwards.
Aug 19 <sup>th</sup> 1300hrs.	Fine sunny day after a cloudless cool night. Light South to SSE wind bringing over many ridges. Patches of alto-cumulus castellanus in afternoon. No migrant passage detected.
Aug 20 <sup>th</sup> (p.m)	Black-headed Gulls - Farset - 50 circling - anting in close humid air. No migration movement - no Swifts.
Aug 5 <sup>th</sup>	- (noted above)
Aug 21 <sup>st</sup>	No movements of any note. Many small white butterflies. Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell in garden. A few wasps in house at Farset. Milby Drain - good displays of Purple Loosestife.
Aug 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Anticyclone developing to west of Eire. Waving front slowly drifting south
Aug 23/ 24	Cloudy NW to North air stream moving round anticyclone centred west of Eire

George Alcock was, above all, an observer. His interests extended to all aspects of the natural world, and his phenological journals are comparable with those of Gilbert White of Selborne in the eighteenth century: '17 July 1790. A nightingale continues to sing, but his notes are short and interrupted. A fly-catcher has a nest in my vines. Young swallows settle on the grass-plots to catch insects.' Living at the edge of the fens, George may well have empathised with the writings of J. A. Baker, the enigmatic author of *The Peregrine* and *The Hill of Summer*, who spent many years walking and cycling alone in East Anglia. Baker wrote: 'I do not believe that honest observation is enough. The emotions and behaviour of the watcher are also facts, and they must be truthfully recorded.'



Sunset kindles in the shallow water; the herons leave the shore, and rise to where the sun still shines. It is already dusk in the green field between the sea-wall and the lane. High clouds redden in the west. A little owl calls from an oak. A flock of migrating greenshank circles slowly in the deep blue autumnal sky, moving steadily and rising over the estuary and the inland fields. Their beautiful, flat, monotonous four-note calls recede and return for ten minutes, till ultimately they die away to the south. Flocks of starlings fly west toward their roosting-place; mallard go inland to feed in the stubble. There is an inevitable stillness here, like the calm solitude of still water. A meadow pipit calls. The green of the grass intensifies, then fades to grey. All shapes recede, then seem to come slowly nearer, as dusk deepens and day ends. Deep in the afterglow, the gently imploring calls of partridges breathe upwards, like smoke-curls of autumn dusk. A hare runs into the dark corn. The empty land reaches out beyond the dusk, into the dews of night, into the fields of stars.

J. A. Baker, *The Hill of Summer* (1969), p. 140

'On the idle hill of summer, sleepy with the flow of streams': A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), Poem XXXV