



Press Release – 26 April 2016
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FINGERS CROSSED FOR SUN

Thirteen times each century the planet Mercury passes between the Earth and the Sun. These events are known as transits of Mercury, during which the planet appears as a tiny dot crossing the Sun's surface. The next transit that is visible from Britain and occurs on the afternoon of Monday 9 May. Celebrate this astronomical rarity by joining the **Museum of the History of Science** and **Hanwell Community Observatory**, led by Dr Christopher Taylor, for a special event in the **public play area by Keble Gate, University Parks, Oxford**.

Dr Lee Macdonald, author of *How to Observe the Sun Safely*, said "Transits of Mercury and Venus have been important events in history and were used to help calculate the size of the universe. This is a rare opportunity to see the planet closest to the Sun not in an observatory at night but as an unusual act of open-air public astronomy."

Mercury is the smallest planet in our solar system, and also the closest to the Sun, completing its orbit in approximately 88 Earth days. Like the Earth, Mercury is a rocky planet and its surface appears similar to our moon, covered in valleys, mountains and craters.

As Mercury is the smallest planet in the solar system its transit cannot be seen with the naked eye, and so experts from the Observatory will be providing specially adapted telescopes for visitors to use. This includes projection telescopes, which will project an image of the Sun and Mercury onto a board on the ground. There will also be a selection of telescopes with professional filters, allowing the public to look through the telescopes directly at the Sun. It is important to stress that the Sun is a dangerous object to observe, and viewing it without specialised equipment can cause permanent eye damage or blindness.

Notes to Editors:

Mercury in Transit

12:00 – 15:00, Monday 9 May 2016

Join the Museum of the History of Science and Hanwell Community Observatory to watch the transit of Mercury and see the planet pass between the Earth and Sun, appearing as a dot crossing its surface!

This event will take place on the **public play area by Keble Gate, University Parks**, Parks Road, Oxford.

Drop-in. Suitable for all the family.

For more information contact:

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About the Museum of the History of Science

MHS houses an unrivalled collection of early scientific instruments in the world's oldest surviving purpose-built museum building, the Old Ashmolean on Broad Street, Oxford. The Museum is a research and teaching department of the University of Oxford, offering free access to its permanent displays and a programme of special exhibitions, family-friendly events, talks and tours, along with taught sessions for schools.

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