

Several people have cast doubts on the whole idea of using the Foulness site. In a report earlier this year to the Ministry of Transport, Mr Ian Fulton wondered whether the return on the capital invested would be great enough to avoid heavy burdens on the whole air-seaport economy. Ornithologists have also been up in arms: the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is coordinating objections from bodies which include the International Council for Bird Preservation, the Wildfowl Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology. The issue here is whether there will be any irreparable loss to the feeding grounds of the dark-bellied brent goose, of which a fifth of the world population winters off Foulness. But Mr MacGregor thinks that the birds will be safe: "we have some very keen ornithologists in TEDCO". And both TAG and TEDCO are convinced that Foulness is the best site for the seaport, in the space available for deep-water facilities and in its proximity to the Continent.

COPERNICUS

Five Hundred Years After

by our Soviet Correspondent

FEBRUARY 1973 will see the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nikolaj Kopernik, known to the world under the latinized version of his name, Nicolaus Copernicus. Preparations are already well under way in Poland, in particular in his native city of Torun, to celebrate this auspicious occasion.

A Copernicus Year has been proclaimed and the opening ceremonies in Torun on the quinqucentenary day, February 19, 1973, will be attended by "delegations from universities, scientific societies, social organizations, and people from all over the country". As the astronomer's birthplace and as the site of the university which he helped to found and which now bears his name, Torun will naturally be the centre of the celebrations. In September 1973 an International Copernicus Conference will be held there under the auspices of the



Nicolaus Copernicus. Contemporary portrait by an unknown artist.

International Union of History and the Philosophical Sciences and special celebrations will mark the opening of the academic year 1973-74. Celebrations will also take place in Copernicus's own alma mater, the University of Cracow. Here, on the opening day of the Copernicus Year, a ceremonial general meeting of the Polish Academy of Sciences will be held.

Preparations are also well under way for the appropriate documentation of the anniversary. The Polish Academy of Sciences, in conjunction with the Polish Universities and Scientific Societies, is preparing a parallel text in Polish and Latin of the astronomer's collected works, as well as a number of supporting monographs and documentary publications on his life and times.

COMPUTERS

ICL Looks East Again

THE demand for computing facilities in Eastern Europe for economic simulation and planning has prompted International Computers Ltd to develop a new model in its Systems 4 series which is just small enough to avoid difficulties over export embargoes. The new machine, known as the Systems 4/62, is three times more powerful than the present Systems 4/50 model but smaller than the 4/70 version which has often run into problems over licences for export to Eastern Europe.

Competition for Eastern European markets is likely to intensify in the coming decade, as IBM and, to a lesser extent, Siemens increase their marketing efforts in this area. Already IBM is believed to have stolen the lead from ICL in East Germany and Yugoslavia, and it is also making inroads in the Romanian and Bulgarian markets. But ICL's best chance of increasing its sales to Eastern Europe, which topped £30 million during the past ten years, seems to lie in stepping up activity in the Soviet Union itself, where the British company enjoys particularly good relations with the key agencies concerned with computer purchasing.

Although the discussions about a giant European computer, based on the Aigrain proposals, seem to be in temporary abeyance, there has been considerable speculation recently about embryo collaborations between the world's computer companies. These have centred on the supposedly routine discussions that have been going on between ICL and other computing companies, notably Control Data Corporation and the Dutch Philips group.

The only clear fact to have emerged, however, is that ICL and the French Compagnie Internationale pour l'Informatique are engaged in wide-ranging talks to identify areas in which they may usefully cooperate, both on the research side and in commercial activities. The possibility of a three way link-up with Control Data Corporation is thought to be remote, although CII already has an agreement with the American company in specific areas of technology. Whether the Philips group will later become involved in an enlarged European link is still an open question, but ICL, which commands nearly half the British market in computers and is the second largest supplier in Europe, is believed to be in no hurry to develop multilateral ties at this early stage of European collaboration in computers.