



PPD Seminar

The Invisible Scanners

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This talk covers a period in the recent history of particle physics (approximately the 1960s and 1970s) when the output of particle colliders was in the form of thousands of photographs of bubble chamber events, and large numbers of relatively unskilled women were brought in to examine and analyse these photographs in search of patterns which might reveal evidence of new particles or unusual decays. These women were largely “invisible” in that they were not named in research papers and received little reward, despite the fact that they were at the forefront of discovery. In this, their story bears some comparison with those of the “Harvard Computers” – women who analysed astronomical photographs in the early 20th century but were not, at the time, given due credit for the discoveries they made – and of others who fell victim to the tendency to highlight the work of prominent individuals while ignoring the parts played by others who assisted them. The talk will include material from an oral history project featuring women who worked as scanners at University College London.

