

OBITUARY

MRS. WALTER MAUNDER

With the passing of Mrs. Walter Maunder on September 15th the British Astronomical Association has lost one of its very earliest members, and we—my husband and myself—have lost a friend of more than half a century.

Her maiden name was Annie Scott Dill Russell: she was born in 1868 in County Tyrone, Ireland, and educated in Belfast and in Girton College, Cambridge, where she won the highest mathematical honour then available for women, being Senior Optime in the Mathematical Tripos in 1889. In 1891 she was appointed “lady computer” in Greenwich observatory, and her chief work there was examining and measuring the daily sunspot photographs. This work led to friendship with Edward Walter Maunder, head of the solar photography department, and also to interest in the B.A.A., which he had founded in 1890. Miss Russell planned the general form of its Journal and gave him other efficient aid in his work of Editor, became Editor herself in 1894 when he was President, and in 1895 they were married. Together Mr. and Mrs. Maunder gave to new members and beginners in astronomy that friendly encouragement which was and still is a feature of the Association. Mrs. Maunder was asked more than once to be President but refused on account of her voice, which would not carry in a large room.

It was during the B.A.A. eclipse expedition of 1896 to Norway and afterwards in their London home that I first became intimate with Mrs. Maunder: my husband has equally happy memories of the 1898 eclipse in India, when he set up his apparatus near that of the Maunders. She had planned and equipped her instrument to photograph the greatest possible extension of the coronal streamers, and she actually secured the longest ever photographed. For although she shared in all her husband's work and writing for astronomy, her alert and original mind often struck out on lines quite her own; and the Sun remained a favourite source of study. Her discovery that there is “An Apparent Influence of the Earth on the Numbers and Areas of Sunspots” was first announced in 1907: an Earth effect doubtless is only “apparent”, but the fact of a decrease in spot frequency as they pass from east to west of the Sun's disk viewed from Earth has never been disproved although not yet understood or satisfactorily explained.

She was also deeply interested in the problem of the origin of the 48 ancient constellations. She and her husband wrote many papers on the subject, and stressed the point that the southern limit of these figures gives a clue to the latitude of their inventors and also to the approximate date of their observations: they also studied the astronomy of the ancient Hindus, Persians, and other nations. Proofs of great climatic changes in various parts of the world, suggesting changes in the Sun, excited her interest: she never wearied in her keen research into these and allied subjects, and had a vast correspondence with people all over the world. Professor Eddington once referred an inquiry on the date of the Nativity to her, as an acknowledged authority on the subject of chronology.

Mr. Maunder died in 1928 to her great grief; but although she never ceased to feel very deeply the loss of her partner, she continued to work as long as possible for the science which she also dearly loved.—M. A. EVERSHED,