

BAA Update

Obituary

William E. Fox 1898–1988

William Edwin Fox was born on 1898 March 29 and lived in Newark all his life. His interest in astronomy was aroused by the Daylight Comet and Halley's Comet in 1910, and his first astronomical drawing was of Halley's Comet – drawn in the margin of a hymn book during a sermon. He lived long enough to see the comet a second time around and, by then, he had been President of the BAA and the recipient of its highest award, the Goodacre Medal (1975).

Professionally, Bill Fox was an engineer with a hydraulics firm in Newark and, during the Second World War, he worked on silent pumps for ships and submarines. Meanwhile he also pursued astronomical interests, aided by the blackout; he particularly observed aurorae, comets, the Moon, Mars and, above all, Jupiter. He had joined the BAA in 1935 and acquired progressively larger telescopes until he received a 250-mm Calver Newtonian on loan from the BAA, which he used from 1949 until his death. He also helped to found the Nottingham Astronomical Society, in 1946, and served as its President in 1954. He was much in demand as a speaker at BAA courses and local society meetings.

His first official position with the BAA was as Assistant Director of both the Mars and the Jupiter Sections in 1952, but his main interest was Jupiter and, from that time on, under A. F. O'D. Alexander's Directorship, Bill Fox took on the plotting of charts of transit measurements for determination of rotation periods and the compilation of Jupiter Section Reports. His first report appeared in the *Journal*, **62**, 280 (1952). Following Alexander's retirement in 1957, Bill Fox became Director of the Section. He held that post for just over 30 years, just short of the record tenure of T. E. R. Phillips. Fox made Phillips the subject of his Presidential Address in 1968 on the centenary of Phillips' birth.

One of the most important events of Fox's time with the Jupiter Section was the professional discovery of radio emission from the planet (1955). Radio astronomers asked the Section to correlate the radio bursts with visual features, and Fox and Alexander plotted charts of the radio and visual features and published reports on the subject. Although the radio bursts turned out to be unrelated to visible clouds, this was an outstanding

example of scientific cooperation. The most exciting events on Jupiter during this period were the recurrent outbreaks of activity in the South Equatorial Belt, of which Fox analysed several. At the invitation of Dr Gerard Kuiper, Fox went to the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory in Arizona for the summer of 1971 to observe Jupiter with the 1.54-metre telescope, in collaboration with professional astronomers. The highlight of this visit was his visual discovery of the great South Equatorial Belt outbreak of 1971. Kuiper wrote that 'his remarkable visual memory of the ever-changing details of the Jupiter cloud patterns, much of it recorded in the *Journal* of the BAA, was a source of much stimulation as we jointly re-examined the LPL collection [of photographs]'.

Personally, Bill Fox was a warm and friendly man, highly regarded by his friends and colleagues. He was greatly supported by his wife Ina, from their marriage in 1921 to her death in 1977. His interests included local history and music; he played the flute, accompanied by his wife on the piano. His son Leslie

and his daughter Doreen still live close to Newark.

One of Bill's lasting contributions to the BAA was the founding of the popular weekend courses at Horncastle, which have been held annually ever since. He served as BAA President from 1966–68 (*Journal* **78**, no.1, 1967). He was also Vice-President more than once. He continued attending BAA meetings and observing, with enthusiasm but decreasing strength, until prevented by ill-health about a year before his death. His observing notebooks from 1935 to 1987 are in the care of the Jupiter Section. He retired as Section Director on the occasion of his 90th birthday, and died the following month on 1988 April 22.

His time of office with the BAA had lasted from before Sputnik until the Voyager flybys of the giant planets. His courteous and helpful guidance helped to keep amateur observation flourishing during those exciting years, and he will be sadly missed.

John Rogers
Richard McKim



Bill Fox with a Jupiter-shaped 90th birthday cake, 1988 April 16.