
 OBITUARY

FRANK MAURICE HOLBORN, L.D.S.

On Friday, 1962 April 13, the Association lost, through the passing of Frank Maurice Holborn, one of the most active, devoted and distinguished members it has known. Reference to the lists of Officers and Councils reveals that since the Association was formed there has been but a handful of men who have served on the Council in varied office so continuously. Holborn's name first appears on the Council List in the 1932-33 Session, and from that time onwards with but five years away in breaks required by the bye-laws, he was to be found somewhere at the Council Table, but usually near the center on one side, every year during those thirty years out of his thirty-seven years' membership.

Born at Bradford on 1884 June 14, a Saturday, he was the younger son of the Late Rev. Alfred Holborn, M.A., and was educated at Mill Hill School. He was a dental surgeon by profession, qualifying from Guy's in 1906, after serving as an assistant dental house surgeon, and it may be remarked here that he was almost the last, if not *the* last of London's private practitioners to employ his own dental mechanic whole-time.

Holborn joined the Association on 1925 July 22, and having already gone the round of the sky with Webb's *Celestial Objects*, which he later gave to the writer and which merely whetted an already insatiable appetite for observing, he started in at once with very modest equipment to contribute his observations to the Association. By the following year, in addition to his two small refractors, he was in possession of an 8½-inch Calver reflector equatorially mounted with which he made his first recorded variable star observation of R Böötis on 1926 July 21, just a year after his election. This was to be his principal instrument for the next twenty years when it was replaced by a 12¼-inch reflector similarly mounted. Incidentally with this smaller telescope he once saw the companion to Sirius. 'Did I ever tell you that I once saw the companion to Sirius when at greatest separation many years ago . . . using the old 8½-inch? I didn't know the p.a. and was very surprised to detect it'. He had remarkable eyesight. He was one of the fortunate ones, too, to see the 1927 solar eclipse from the Yorkshire moors.

In 1935 the V.S.S. Chart Committee was formed and in the division of labour Holborn was entrusted with the selection of stars for the new comparison star sequences, checking the adopted magnitudes and vetting the charts before official acceptance and issue. For this he was eminently suited, for apart from his acuity of vision he was an experienced observer; and although the work was at times perhaps irksome to him, for it interfered with his own observing programme, it was carried out with the meticulous care with which he undertook anything. Innumerable hours were spent at the eyepiece on this work alone. 'The job I shall never live to see finished is the revision of sequences; so much vetting at the telescope remains to be done

and that must be unhurried', he wrote. In this year, too, he became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and later served on the Council and House Committee of that body.

January 1937 found him observing Gamma Cassiopeiae with naked eye and sending the observations to the Norman Lockyer Observatory where they subsequently formed the principal material for comparing visual and spectro-metric changes in that star. Years later it must have been particularly gratifying to him to write: 'I have been sent a printed curve of my observations of γ Cas. They are going to be used'. The writer is indebted to Mr D. R. Barber the then Superintendent of the Observatory, who most kindly answered queries concerning Holborn's observations, giving three distinctive features revealed from an analysis of these over twenty-one years, which contributes material for a Paper that Mr Barber hopes shortly to publish. In this year 1937, too, the threat of building encroachments and increasing street lighting caused him to face the ordeal of moving to a quieter part of Streatham after twenty-eight years in this home. A picture of his observatory is in *J.B.A.A.*, Vol. 50, No. 9. The quiet way he describes 'the regular work done' in one sentence is characteristic of him.

On the death of Mr Bartrum in 1939 April, Holborn was chosen to take over as Acting Secretary and Curator of Instruments for that session and was then elected to these two offices. He resigned the curatorship in 1944 but continued as Secretary throughout the difficult war years. Then, too, he served on the historic joint R.A.S./B.A.A. Committee when the Association moved into Burlington House. These years were probably his busiest period, for besides his practice, his Civil Defence duties, his twin offices as Secretary and Curator, he yet fitted in some observing, still keeping some watch on every one of the variable stars on the Section's List. He complained: 'What I dislike is missing some rare event or finding that some L.P.V. has been neglected'. One can imagine the Warden relieving the lone watches by observing γ Cas; he could never waste a clear sky. More important still, perhaps, it was Holborn who kept the V.S.S. knit together by personal contact and tireless correspondence when the then Director was away on military service; indeed it is no exaggeration to say that for some time Holborn *was* the V.S.S. With his passion for team work he would have made a perfect Director for any observing Section.

During the two sessions 1946 and 1948 Holborn was President. His first Address, which has since been reprinted, was on 'The Beginner's Telescope', to encourage the newcomer to our ranks. The second Address, with which he ended his term of office, was on his own investigation into the place of each known type of variable star in the Russell Diagram.

He retired from practice in 1950 and moved to Peaslake where he could use his observatory to the best advantage and added a 5-inch Ross refractor to his equipment.

In 1952, by unanimous vote, the Council awarded him his last honour; the Walter Goodacre Medal and Gift in recognition of his contribution to variable star astronomy and his devoted services to the Association. It would be

his wish to be remembered, as he will be in astronomy, as an outstanding observer of variable stars. His Presidential Address is perhaps the only time he ventured into the realm of theoretical investigation; he was happiest at the eyepiece. Figures are not available, but at a conservative estimate he contributed 40 000 observations to the V.S.S. alone, apart from the comparison star sequence work noted above, naked-eye observations for sun-spots counts on every possible day throughout his membership, and some planetary observing. His favourite stars were the irregular variables of U Gem and Z Cam type, on which he contributed several Papers to the *Journal*, and nothing on earth delighted him more than to receive postcards direct from another observatory, hastily scribbled with torch in mouth, giving one's latest observations of these stars to compare with his own. His last talk was on one of these, which has just been added to the V.S.S. list, and his last remark in that talk was a call for more observers. He was Hale's amateur astronomer who worked in astronomy because he couldn't help it.

One last happy major event may be recorded: his Golden Wedding Anniversary on Tuesday, 1959 July 21. For in 1909 he married Isobel Kynoch and they set up home in Streatham where we first encountered him in this record. Mrs Holborn and their two sons survive him.

For some months he had been in failing health and strength, and early this year a sudden worsening in his condition required his admission into Guy's Hospital where he was able to have a private room. Even from there he had to write: 'Have seen γ and β Aurigae out of window more than once through London murk.' Later his condition allowed his removal to a Nursing Home only three miles from his own door. But a sudden relapse necessitated his return to Guy's where he passed peacefully away near to the place where he had trained and qualified fifty-six years ago.

Maurice Holborn was no fair weather friend; he was there when the gales blew and was often more concerned with others' troubles than with his own. But with his shyness of giving any hint of demonstrativeness masked by a casual manner at first almost off-handed, few perhaps knew and understood him at once. With intimacy he could sometimes be induced to think aloud but even then only if assured of sympathetic reception; argument and contention were not in his line. In outlook he was a Theosophist. His other interests were photography, at which he excelled in early life, nature study and gardening, and he was an enthusiastic tennis player until quite late in his life. To many of us this loss is irreparable.

G.E.P.