

Obituary

E. H. Collinson, 1903–1990

Edward Howard Collinson, the eldest son of John Howard Collinson and Sarah Catharine (née Penney) was born on 1903 November 15 in Ipswich and lived in Suffolk all his life. He became interested in astronomy at the age of ten, and his first astronomical notebooks date from 1914, when he was attending Ackworth School along with his brothers Hugh and the late Norman; later he attended Bootham (also a Quaker school) and continued his observations with various small refractors. He was able to see Nova Aquila 1918 three days after its discovery in June, and followed its magnitude and colour changes for some months. Edward joined the BAA on 1920 November 24 and was its third-oldest member when he died in its Centenary year. His astronomical observations were to receive their first mention in print in the report of the 1921 BAA Exhibition meeting: ‘... perhaps the most interesting exhibits were those by the schoolboys of Bootham School, Yorkshire, a school which has an astronomical tradition, for one of its schoolboy members was a discoverer of Novae Andromedae in 1885. The exhibits were notebooks by E. H. Collinson, W. A. Duckworth, A. Halliday and A. A. Miles, whose ages ranged from 15 to 18 ...’ (*Journal*, 31, 214). In his membership of seven decades he served the Association with distinction in numerous capacities. He never sought publicity and was always very modest about his observational work.

Upon leaving School, Edward served Articles as a solicitor to J. B. Cullingham in Ipswich, for whom his father had worked. He took his solicitors’ Finals in 1927, spending almost all of his professional career with the firm of Block and Cullingham, becoming Senior Partner in 1946. Edward served as President of the Suffolk and North-East Essex Law Society in 1959, while he was also a Trustee of the Ogilvie Trust (administering Almshouses and charitable funds) between 1930 and 1982. Later, his son followed his father in the legal profession.

In his earlier years Edward’s hobbies included tennis, travel, walking and mountain climbing. But astronomy dominated his thoughts from an early age, as we have already noted. In the 1920s he used a modest 3-inch (75-mm) refractor which he mounted in his garden on a cast iron pier. He tried his hand at photography from an early age and set up various cameras on a simple equator-



Edward Howard Collinson.
Presidential portrait.

ial mount. In this he received encouragement from H. H. Waters, then a prominent member and an authority on the subject. A gramophone motor and a driving rod were contrived to provide the motion in RA. Most of the photos were wide-angle ones of star fields, and long exposures were possible in the dark skies of rural Suffolk in the 1920s. His interests moved early on towards meteor photography, but the long hours of work involved caused him to invent an ingenious automatic meteor camera, which he described in the *Journal* for 1929 February (39, 150) and 1934 February (44, 156). This camera changed plates every hour while the observer could go to bed. The meteor work brought him into contact with a life-long friend, J. P. M. Prentice of Stowmarket (who was also a solicitor). Manning Prentice, together with G. E. D. Alcock and Collinson formed the backbone of the Meteor Section for many years. Although Edward did a great deal of meteor photography before the Second World War, and wrote about it several times in the *Journal*, the lenses and emulsions then available led to limited success. Later, however, large fast lenses became available as war-surplus items, and Edward was probably the first to apply them to meteor work. He obtained several excellent images of bright meteors, including one of a fireball in 1948, reproduced here. He encouraged Harold Ridley to attempt

meteor spectrography, in which field the latter achieved considerable success. Edward’s photographic work continued into the 1960s and he obtained particularly good results with the 1956 Perseids. He also did a good deal of comet photography.

Apart from his ‘schoolboy’ observations, Collinson did not pay much attention to the planets in the nineteen-twenties as he lacked a large instrument, but he did observe Mercury in transit in 1924, and in the same year saw Mars at the closest opposition of the twentieth century through a friend’s 10-inch reflector when on holiday in Brighton. This series of nine drawings was the first he contributed to the Mars Section. He was inspired by the work of Professor W. H. Pickering on ‘lunar vegetation’ and made series of drawings of the dark patches in the lunar crater Eratosthenes, which he published in the *Journal* (34, 306).

In 1930 Edward was invited to make systematic use of the 10-inch (254-mm) Merz refractor at Orwell Park, Nacton, Ipswich. This telescope, once used by the eccentric Colonel Tomline had not been used much since the Colonel’s death. Living only a short car journey away, Collinson put the telescope to good use, principally on Mars and Jupiter during 1930–35. The dome rail of the Orwell Park telescope afforded spectacular views of the surrounding countryside, being built on a very high tower, and Edward often reminisced about those times in later years. His drawings appeared in the Jupiter *Memoirs* and some of his Mars work appeared in the *Journal*. He also took some lunar photographs. Many years later he told the writer that this had probably been the best planetary work he had accomplished. Edward’s drawings were always accurate and artistic, but he considered that he never saw exceptionally fine planetary detail. By the 1930s Edward was enjoying a voluminous correspondence with Prentice, Waters, W. M. Lindley and many others; he preserved most of this till the end of his life.

In 1935 he was elected FRAS and also borrowed the Association’s 10-inch With-Browning reflector, on a massive German equatorial mount, and built a run-off shed in which to house it in his garden at Felixstowe (*Journal*, 45, 248). This instrument stayed with him till he felt he could no longer make full use of it, in the late 1980s. He kept up his meteor work and started observing fainter variable stars (in addition to Mars and