



Obituary

Dr David Myles Gavine (1937–2020)

(Compiled from notes by the deceased.)

Local and national astronomical groups lost a widely known and respected speaker and friend when David Myles Gavine passed away on 2020 Jan 2 after a short illness. Known to his friends as Dave, or Dr Dave, he was an ambassador for astronomy with his wide knowledge and trademark humour delivered with an instantly recognisable Scottish accent.

Dave was born in Dundee, Scotland on 1937 May 9, the only child of Thomas Gavine and Mary Chalmers. His father was killed while working as a shipyard joiner when David was only a year old, and he was brought up in a large family of aunts and grandparents during the austere war years. His childhood was blighted by periods of severe illness, culminating in rheumatic fever which left him bed-ridden for over a year and allowed no exercise of any kind until the age of 13. His mother, 'Molly', provided him with books and encyclopaedias and he developed skills in model-making and art. Using simple star charts, he knew the constellations and main stars by the age of 12.

His poor early health and the repressive primary school which he attended did not deter Dave, and by the time he started secondary education he had more than made up any earlier loss. His education took him to the technical course at Rockwell School, where he aspired to become a joiner like his father and other men in his family. However, science caught Dave's imagination and so he continued his education at Morgan Academy where he was fortunate to have superb teachers, especially in mathematics and science. He also discovered Dundee's Mills Observatory, excellent library and museum. His astronomical interests were further developed by reading Hutchinson's *Splendour of the Heavens*. Dave attended evening classes in astronomy which were given by Dr Jaroslav Cisař, the Curator of Mills Observatory at that time.

In 1956 Dave met up with an old school friend, Harry Ford. Harry and Dave had friends who shared an interest in astronomy and the idea was born that a local astronomical club could be started. The plan was acted upon and Dundee Astronomical Society was formed, with Dave's charismatic physics teacher, Bill Dow, as its first President and Dave as Secretary. This small society, which eventually met in Mills Observatory, Dundee, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2016 with a BAA Out of London Weekend Meeting. Over the years, the Society has grown and, in its time, produced a number of notable astronomers and scientists including Dr Tom Lloyd-Evans, Dr Niall Reid and Robert McNaught.

Dave graduated with a BSc from the University of St Andrews in 1960, and was awarded the J. F. Scott Prize in Geology. Careers in Earth sciences were few then, so he took teacher training and taught science in Dundee junior secondary schools for several years. Meanwhile,

he was actively engaged in observing the aurora during the International Geophysical Year and beyond. Intent on furthering his career, he went back to study at the University of Aberdeen, and in 1969 took an MA with second class honours in Geography, supporting himself by part-time teaching.

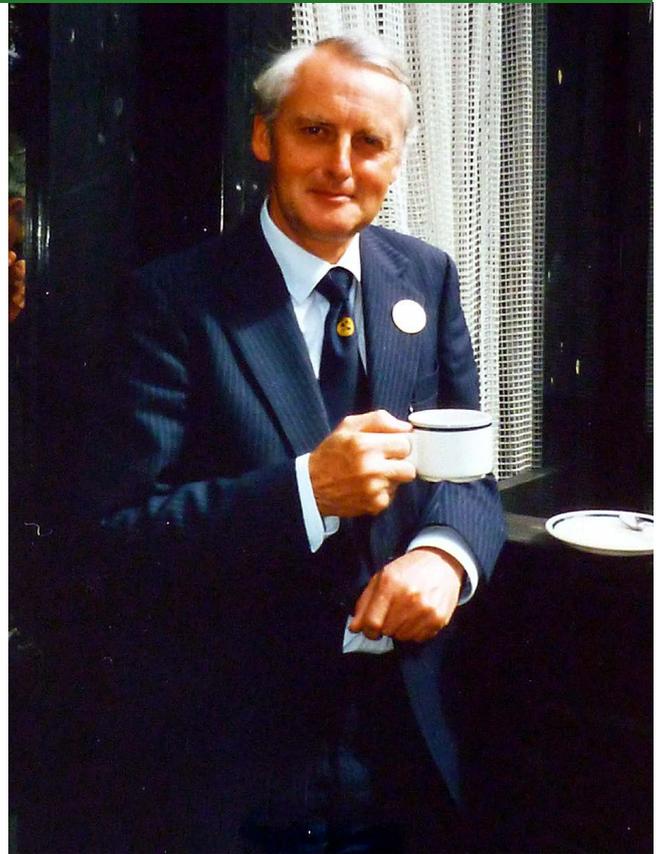
A further year teaching science at Grove Academy, Dundee, was followed by his appointment as a Master at Fort Augustus Abbey School, teaching geography, geology and junior science. From here he ran the village climatology station, started a school astronomy club and set up a small planetarium using a cistern ball projector which he and Harry Ford had made some years earlier. The planetarium dome, made of cardboard egg boxes and fence wire, was hung from the ceiling of a classroom. Benefactors gifted 6-inch and 11¼-inch reflectors to the club.

An active aurora-watching network was set up, linking Fort Augustus with Dundee and St Andrews. In 1978, Dave became Assistant to the BAA Aurora Section Director, Ron Livesey.

In 1979 Dave was offered a lectureship at Leith Nautical College in Edinburgh, teaching navigational astronomy and meteorology, and was in charge of the fine GOTO planetarium which became popular with school pupils, teachers and many other groups. This continued after the Nautical College closed in 1987, when it became a further education college in which Dave taught mathematics and science. He retired in 1995 and continued for a few years to offer evening classes in astronomy, geology and meteorology. Dave had previously run GCE O-level astronomy classes in Dundee and Fort Augustus, prior to those in Edinburgh.

He joined the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh, serving as President for three years and introducing a journal which he edited for 20 years. He was awarded the Lorimer Medal for a lifetime of promoting astronomy, and was invited to become President of Dundee Astronomical Society in 1979.

Dave was a member of the Society for the History of Astronomy, the Royal Meteorological Society, the British Sundial Society and the Geological Society of Edinburgh. He was



Dave Gavine, photographed by Ken Kennedy in 1990.

elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1963.

From joining the BAA in 1955, Dave was primarily an observer of aurorae and noctilucid clouds, but sometimes contributed to the Meteor, Lunar, Variable Star and Historical Sections. He was Assistant Director to Ron Livesey and Ken Kennedy of the Aurora Section for some 30 years, and Director from 2005 until 2010. He was awarded the Association's Lydia Brown Medal in 2003 and in 2012 May, asteroid 7120 was named Davidgavine by its discoverer Robert McNaught, in recognition of Dave's contribution to astronomy.

An interest in the history of astronomy in Scotland – especially in the activities of forgotten luminaries such as Thomas Dick – became, as he put it, 'a hobby that got out of hand'. He was encouraged to carry out serious research by his friend Prof Eric Forbes, who became his supervisor. Nine years of part-time research in archives all over Britain resulted in the award of Scotland's first Open University PhD in 1982, on Astronomy in Scotland 1745–1900.

Dave enjoyed classical music, zany humour and cartoons (many drawn by his own hand), walking all over Scotland and holidaying in England, Europe and Canada.

Ken Kennedy, Dundee Astronomical Society