

FRANK J. ACFIELD, 1905-1975

AN APPRECIATION PREPARED BY HAROLD GOOCH

Newcastle upon Tyne Astronomical Society, c/o Sir Howard Grubb Parsons & Co. Ltd.
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Many hundreds, if not thousands, will have known and revered Frank Acfield, particularly in the North of England where he came to live in 1936 until his death on 1975 March 13; here, for close on 40 years, he was to enliven in others a curiosity and excitement about things in space.

Born at Southampton on 1905 January 6 he set himself on the road of eager discovery, patient enquiry and a resulting boundless enthusiasm in a novel but very practical way. Frank's father had a reputation as an accomplished marksman and competed regularly at Bisley. At the age of 14 Frank chose to turn his father's spotting telescope to no earthbound target but to the wonders of the sky. He remained its captive for the rest of his 70 years. Trained in the skills connected with the woollen industry, in yarn and textiles, his work brought him to live in Newcastle upon Tyne in the mid-thirties, there to meet and marry Aurea Patterson, whose loving support helped Frank to have such a wide and caring influence on all around him.

Already a member of the British Astronomical Association, Frank Acfield was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1945 and later was to be honoured by the Société Astronomique de France. In 1949 he set up his own observatory at his home at Forest Hall, a residential area to the north of the city with a good horizon all around and allowing the maximum from his 254 mm reflector.

A Vice-President of Newcastle upon Tyne Astronomical Society he included amongst his duties the collation of members' observations, with many wise words of encouragement and advice. He did much for the Jupiter Section of the BAA and also worked extensively in the fields of cometary and auroral work as well as in the patient pursuit of the minor planets. Much of his outstanding photographic work is still widely reproduced.

Despite these self-imposed demands on his time the joy he experienced could not be contained. The most significant part of Frank Acfield's life was his complete inability to keep it all to himself. Through the medium of the extra-mural studies facilities of both Durham and Newcastle Universities he lectured extensively—conveying with a disarming and unsophisticated simplicity his wide knowledge of astronomy and of its contemporary development—conveying it with as much technical detail

as one might wish, but never without that barely-suppressed excitement and wonder that he felt so strongly and radiated so compellingly.

The careful observation, the expert and patient photography, the two or three public lectures a week were but part of Frank Acfield's 'task' as he saw it. Throughout the fifties and sixties he was the Astronomical Correspondent of the Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*—a job in which his wife could happily engage in the typing and preparation of copy. Besides sustaining a regular monthly column, he wrote prolifically on various aspects of space exploration and discovery and, above all, on the importance of observation. On several occasions he would write of a lunar eclipse occurring that night, would observe and photograph throughout the event, and then publish a report in the following evening edition! Always he wrote in the natural unaffected style used when lecturing. He was always intensely anxious that the non-astronomer should share his own excitement and understanding that he never considered to be beyond the range of anyone. In this he was quick to encourage ability and there are today amateur astronomers of some stature who owe much to his encouragement.

It is not without significance that Patrick Moore should wish to recognize his work with the transmission of a *Sky at Night* programme from Frank's own observatory in 1970. Neither is it without significance that complete strangers may meet to discover the common bond that they each attended one of his lectures or read his works. Such men as Frank Acfield are never forgotten and their work and their personality endures.

WEEKEND RESIDENTIAL COURSE IN WINCHESTER, 1979

MURIEL WRIGLEY

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The clouds which persisted over King Alfred's College in April made observing impossible during the thirteenth weekend course. In all other aspects the organizer and panel are to be congratulated for arranging a most refreshing and instructive programme for over 200 annual and first