

Ken Beames (1899-1989)

On 1889 March 28 the BAA and Australian astronomy lost one of its most remarkable amateur astronomers with the death of Ken Beames. Born in Western New South Wales on 1899 August 16, Beames became a telegraph operator with the local Post Office before serving in the ANZAC Mounted Division of the Australian Light Horse during World War I. After returning to Sydney he trained as an electrical fitter, and in 1924 established his own business which eventually proved highly successful.

During the 1930s Beames developed an interest in astronomy and after completing a number of 15.2-cm mirrors and a 30.5-cm, was inspired to greater heights. In the late 30s he imported a 61-cm crown glass blank from Chance Brothers in England, and began working this on a home-made grinding machine. By the outbreak of the Second World War he had completed the primary mirror and the telescope tube and mounting.

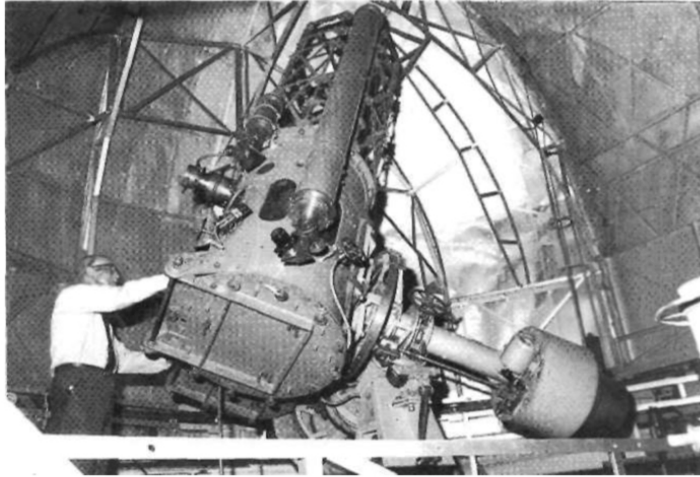
During the War, the K. Beames Engineering Company produced sighting telescope and signalling lamp optics for the Royal Australian Navy. Beames also joined the New South Wales Branch of the British Astronomical Association at this time (in 1943), and began a search for a suitable location for an observatory. He eventually chose the Blue Mountains township of Linden, 80 km west of Sydney, and after the War transferred his engineering business there.

During the late 1940s and early 50s, Beames completed the 61-cm reflector and a 15.2-cm guidescope, and installed these in an observatory. The large telescope has a bent Cassegrainian (i.e. Nasymth) optical configuration, with a lattice tube, and a finely-finished equatorial mounting. It is a work of great beauty and is a tribute to Beames's engineering and optical genius. Also attached to the large reflector is a 43.2-cm

Schmidt, but the corrector plate for this was never completed.

Linden Observatory, which houses these three telescopes, is a 6.1-m square brick structure, with a 3.7-m galvanised iron dome. Despite their potential, Beames never used his instruments for any serious astronomical work—he was a perfect example of that well-known breed, telescope-maker not user.

During the last few years of his life,



Ken Beames and the Linden Observatory telescopes.

Beames's major astronomical preoccupation was the construction of a planetarium modelled on Zeiss designs, and he planned to install this in an 18.3-m dome on his 45 hectare property and turn the whole complex into an astronomical education centre. When he died, virtually all of the mechanical components had been completed, and he was in the process of finalizing the optical projection system.

Beames was a long-standing member and strong supporter of the NSW Branch of the BAA but, because of the distances involved, was unable to attend meetings often after moving to Linden. A quiet unassuming man, he never published any accounts of his remarkable achievements, but a recent biographical account (*Australian Journal of Astronomy*, 3 (2), 63-74) goes some way towards redressing this.

Ken Beames was Australia's most remarkable amateur telescope-maker during the 1940s and 50s, and has an important place in Australian astronomical history. Linden Observatory is both his legacy to the nation and his monument.

Wayne Orchiston