



Obituary

Dr Fiona Vincent (1949–2021)

Fiona Vincent had a long association with the Astronomy Group in the School of Physics & Astronomy at the University of St Andrews, having studied there and contributed to public engagement in science and academic life for most of her career.

Fiona was born on 1949 November 23 in London, but her father's job moved to Edinburgh shortly afterwards and she was brought up in that city, where she went to George Watson's Ladies' College.

She studied at the University of St Andrews, initially as an undergraduate after arriving in 1968, and later earning her PhD in astronomy in 1980. Her subsequent career path included a spell with the BBC World Service in London. In 1982 she was appointed City Astronomer in Dundee and she held the post until 1994. In this role, she directed a major redevelopment of Mills Observatory (then Britain's only full-time public observatory).

From 1996 to 2016, Fiona held an honorary lectureship in the School of Physics & Astronomy at St Andrews. There, with her husband and colleague Roger Stapleton, she pursued a vigorous outreach programme for primary schools throughout Fife, of which the St Andrews mobile planetarium was the centrepiece. She presented some 200 shows from 1996 to 2003. Until 2012, Fiona maintained a monthly web page on 'What's in the Sky', which enjoyed a high profile among local astronomical societies affiliated to the BAA and the Scottish Astronomers' Group. She had a sharp eye for unintentionally hilarious

typographical errors and ambiguities in peer-reviewed astronomical publications, which she exposed mercilessly as a regular contributor to the 'Here and There' column of *The Observatory* magazine.

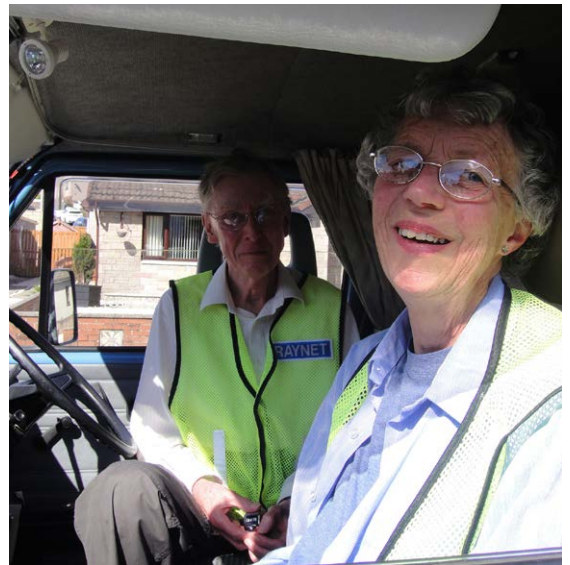
In 1998, she delivered a series of lectures on Positional Astronomy as a segment of the second-level undergraduate astronomy module in the School of Physics & Astronomy at St Andrews. The URL of the superb lecture notes she prepared for the students quickly escaped into the wild on the then-new World Wide Web; it soon established itself as the world's go-to site for information on the subject. Fiona continued to maintain these pages in response to user feedback for a further 23 years. Today, they still provide the top hits for Google searches for 'positional astronomy' or 'spherical trigonometry'. She was delighted to discover that she shared her name with the fictional *Star Trek* starship *USS Fiona Vincent NCC-8010*, and that one fan site describing the ship featured a link to her web pages.

Fiona acted as a tutor and study advisor on several Open University (OU) astronomy courses, including a third-year course on astrophysics that incorporated remote-observing projects with robotic telescopes operated by the OU on the islands of Mallorca and Tenerife. Closer to home in St Andrews, she maintained active research in astrometric and photometric studies of asteroids and other small solar-system objects, from the home observatory that she and Roger operated together amidst a beautifully cultivated garden,

whose hedges were carefully designed as a shield against encroaching light pollution.

She was a very early member of the British Sundial Society. She designed two sundials for the Mills Observatory while she was there, as well as several others including a pair in her garden at home. Recently, she was proofreading for the *British Sundial Society Bulletin*.

Having gained her radio amateur's licence while working for the BBC, Fiona maintained the interest she shared with Roger in amateur radio. Together, they put it to good use for safety communications at car rallies and similar events around Scotland. Since 2007, when she trained as a keep-fit teacher with the Medau Movement, she led a weekly exercise class for older women in St Andrews. 🇬🇧



Dr Fiona Vincent, with her husband Roger. (Photo courtesy of Jim Burke)

Roger Stapleton

Errata in 2022 Handbook

Members are advised of the following errors in the 2022 *Handbook* of the BAA, which was enclosed with the paper edition of the 2021 *October Journal*:

- On p.24: 'Superior Conjunction: –' should read 'Superior Conjunction: Oct. 22'. This information is correct in the *Sky Diary* on p.5.
- Also on p.24: 'Inferior Conjunction: Jan. 8' should read 'Inferior Conjunction: Jan. 9'. This event is omitted from the *Sky Diary* – it should be on p.4.

Actual UT times:

- Venus inferior conjunction –
2022 Jan 9, 0:48
- Venus superior conjunction –
2022 Oct 22, 21:17

Corrections to these and the errors given on p.398 of the 2021 *December Journal* are also listed at britastro.org/downloads. 🇬🇧



Fiona in the planetarium at the Mills Observatory, Dundee, in c.1993. (Photo courtesy of Ken Kennedy)