



Storm Richard Dunlop (1942–2025)

A past president of the BAA and well-known populariser of astronomy, Storm Dunlop led a life dedicated to the stars and weather.

Storm Dunlop, the renowned astronomer, meteorologist, lecturer, author and translator, passed away peacefully on Thursday, 2025 January 23, at St Richard's Hospital, Chichester. Known for his passion for the skies and his ability to make the complexities of weather and astronomy accessible to all, he leaves behind a legacy that will inspire future generations. He was a polymath, specialising in astronomy, meteorology and the natural sciences.

Early life & career

Storm was born in Hillingdon in 1942, and like many of us, he became interested in astronomy and the weather when he was very young. He remembered reading a book on astronomy at the age of six, borrowed from the local library.

It seems fitting that someone called Storm would also take an interest in the weather. His devoted mother Vera, a huge inspiration and support to him until her death, was once asked why she had chosen the name. She replied that she liked that name for a boy, but if her baby had been a girl she would have named her Gale!

Storm's father Walter (known as Dickie) was a highly intelligent man who worked for the Ministry of Defence. He taught Storm to sail a dinghy in Portsmouth and Langstone Harbour.

As a child, Storm suffered with chest problems and migraines, contracting rheumatic fever when he was about ten and missing a year of primary school. He and his parents did not want him to repeat the year, so he was homeschooled from then on. Always fastidious in his commitment to detail and accuracy in his work, he had a natural aptitude for languages. One of his tutors was Russian, and perhaps the linguistic interests stemmed from there.

As a young man, Storm went to work in an optics firm where he made telescopes, further developing his interest in astronomy. He could by now translate from French, German, and Spanish, and was proficient in reading a couple of other languages. He worked for electrical and mechanical engineering companies, and translated large numbers of business documents, specifications, contracts, scientific reports, etc.

Storm the volunteer

In the late 1960s, he joined a number of local and national scientific societies. He was a long-time member of the South Downs Astronomical Society (SDAS), attending meetings for over 50 years. John Mason remembers first meeting him on a cold November night in 1971 during a visit by SDAS members to the Nelson Observatory

on the top of Portsdown Hill. There, Storm was involved in making the optics of a large reflecting telescope built by him and his colleagues. He published a number of papers on mirror-making, including one on the use of plastic optical components. Storm was also a member of the Portsmouth Astronomical Group (now Hampshire Astronomical Group).

Storm joined the BAA in 1969 and remained a lifelong member, making significant contributions to the Association and its Variable Star Section (VSS). From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, in addition to serving as VSS Assistant Director, he edited and distributed its *Circular*, cutting the stencils in the early days, and he guided its evolution towards the respected publication that it is today. The VSS photometry database lists 311 of Storm's visual estimates made between 1970 and 1977. He was involved at the start of the project to computerise the VSS database of magnitude estimates, and with the introduction of computers into the BAA Office.

He was very active on Council as an Honorary Secretary during 1980–1986, responsible for refereeing all papers submitted to the *Journal* and for arranging all the speakers at the Association's meetings: an onerous task. When Heather Cooper retired as President, she nominated Storm as her successor, and he served in this role from 1986 to 1987.

In addition to holding courses on astronomy and meteorology in a local college, Storm gave talks to many astronomical societies across the UK; his principal topic was variable stars.

A Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society, he was an expert on the weather and a skilled photographer of weather phenomena. He was frequently asked to contribute articles to websites and blogs. For example, he wrote a couple of articles about the weather of Sussex and Dorset for the BBC's online series 'Wild Weather'.

In 1987, he attended an IAU Colloquium in Paris on 'The Contribution of Amateur Astronomers to Astronomy', one of the earliest pro-am meetings, and with Dr Michèle Gerbaldi he edited the *Proceedings of Colloquium 98 of the IAU*. Prof. Enrique Velasco Caravaca (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) remembers it as his first international conference and Storm generously helped him put together his paper. He remarks on Storm's enormous task of supervising and diligently refining every paper in the *Proceedings*. A true labour of love.

Translating & writing

For personal interest, Storm translated the original (German) edition of Cuno Hoffmeister's classic work *Variable Stars* into English, and



later the second edition by Hoffmeister, Richter and Wenzel, published in 1985. Other notable translations include the 1,400-page *The Observer's Guide to Astronomy*, by P. Martinez (1994); *The Astronomer Jules Janssen: A Globetrotter of Celestial Physics*, by F. Launay (2012); and *Young Sun, Early Earth and the Origins of Life: Lessons for Astrobiology*, by Gargaud *et al.* (2013).

Storm was also involved in editing the English versions of various works, such as: *The Hamlyn Encyclopedia of Stars & Planets*, by A. Rukl (1989); *The Collected Works of Karl Schwarzschild*, edited by H.-H. Voigt (1991), and the well-known *The Observer's Sky Atlas*, by Erich Karkoschka (1990).

As well as having a professional career translating for European publishers – which required considerable effort to convey the subtleties of the original texts, sometimes involving liaising with the author, and often necessitating a great deal of research – he was a prolific and meticulous author on astronomy and meteorology. Storm's numerous books and guides illuminated the intricacies of the natural world. Publications such as *Come Rain or Shine*, *Dictionary of Weather*, *Guide to Weather Forecasting*, *Weather Identification Handbook*, *Amateur Astronomy*, *Practical Astronomy*, *Atlas of the Night Sky*, and the *Night Sky & Weather Almanacs* helped countless people understand the phenomena shaping our skies and the stars beyond.

His long-term collaboration with celestial cartographer Wil Tirion produced the popular annual *Guide to the Night Sky* and a range of planispheres. Most of his writings were for adults, but some books were for children. Collectively, his works were translated into at least 22 languages. The most successful was probably *Astronomy: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Night Sky*, with total sales of about 250,000.



His reach was extensive, with an international reputation. In support of authorship and authors' rights, fees and royalties, he was a director on the board of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society.

The saga of the escaped monkeys

Storm's mother, Vera, loved animals and she was quite a character; he planned to write a memoir about her life. He loved to tell the story about her and the escaped monkeys.

When he was about five, Storm was taken by Vera to a zoo owned by a Miss Vinning from Yorkshire, who also kept liberty horses and performing dogs. Vinning was contracted to take these to the Channel Islands, with a penalty clause if she did not go. Typical of her character, Vera said: 'I will look after the zoo for you'. And so, offer accepted, she became responsible for a Himalayan bear, monkeys, and miscellaneous other animals, including fallow deer and zebras, which Storm's father had to walk along Portsmouth's South Parade promenade to give them exercise.

One day, a monkey somehow got out of its cage. Vera asked a trapeze artist, Bill, to get up onto the cage and drive the monkey down to the door, where she would let it back in. As she opened the door, another monkey escaped, and they both disappeared! One was recovered, after being found sitting on a lady's dressing table in Craneswater. But the other one was still on the loose. Vera was allocated a police car and a driver to tour around Portsmouth looking for it. Finally, somebody saw the monkey in Festing Road, Southsea, so Vera went round there.

A very nicely dressed lady answered her door to a flustered Vera, with a catching pole in hand, from whom she learned there was a monkey in her dining room. It was August Bank Holiday Monday, and her guests were coming to lunch. Vera and a policeman were in fits of laughter: the monkey had a radio off the wall and was bounding the length of the dining table, all laid out for the guests. The woman exclaimed: 'Don't feed the monkey, then we can catch it.' Of course, when the guests arrived, they fed it everything they could think of! Eventually, it was recaptured.

Storm used to say, 'My mother must be the only person who has had a police car and driver put at her disposal to chase monkeys around Portsmouth.'

Farewell to the Greyhound Man

Storm supported the Harbour conservancy and dark-skies movement with his long-standing friend Richard Austin. Storm had many friends and acquaintances in and around the village of East Wittering, and he was known as 'The Greyhound Man' for his love of owning and walking rescued greyhounds, adopted from the local Greyhound Trust. He made many friends through this passion. He supported the National Trust and English Heritage, and retained his interests in geology and palaeontology.



Figure 1. Photo taken at the BAA Variable Star Section centenary meeting on 1991 Oct 19. L-R: John Toone, Roger Pickard, John Isles, Melvyn Taylor, Guy Hurst, Storm Dunlop. (Richard Fleet; image retouched by James Dawson)

His love of birds was enduring, and in his latter months he used to watch them, the weather and nature from his chair, always wanting the doors open. Sadly, Storm had suffered with ill health for so much of his life and this makes his many accomplishments even more remarkable. Less mobile after a fall, he was the most uncomplaining person and demonstrated appreciation, endurance and fortitude, stating that he was happy to be alive. He celebrated his 82nd birthday with his friends around him in 2024 October.

Storm's wishes for a woodland burial reflected his deep connection to nature, a theme woven throughout his life's work. His informal funeral was held at 1 p.m. on Friday, 2025 February 28, at the Sustainability Centre natural burial ground near Petersfield.

His intellect was out of this world, and he did not suffer fools gladly, but he was also the most inclusive, grounded and humble man one could ever meet. He had a good wit and liked to laugh. He drew people to him just by being generous with his time and books, sharing his passions, and with his genuineness. He made dedicated friends who stuck with him right to the end. (Denis Buczynski recalled a highly memorable visit by lifelong friends Storm and Dr Dave Gavine. They both enjoyed each other's company and the curmudgeonly banter between them was like having Statler and Waldorf (from the Muppets) in residence!)

Storm had a twinkle in his eye that matched the stars, warmed the heart and lit his face. He will be fondly remembered and sorely missed by his many friends.

Acknowledgements

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Janice Cowan & Alex Pratt



Figure 2. During a visit to Tarbat Ness. L-R: Denis Buczynski, Rhona Fraser, Storm Dunlop, Dave Gavine. (Denis Buczynski)



Figure 3. Storm examines a fossil.



Figure 4. Storm and greyhounds.