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## **ALFRED CURTIS: 1901-1976**

AN APPRECIATION PREPARED BY STORM DUNLOP

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Alfred Curtis was born in Portsmouth in 1901, but it was not until his family moved to Winchester when he was ten that he developed his passionate interest in astronomy, receiving great encouragement from an enthusiastic schoolmaster. Indeed, family tradition has it that while he might well be late for any other event, this was completely unknown when it was a question of lessons or anything else relating to astronomy! His first serious observations were made with a 75 mm refractor, which was soon supplemented by a 165 mm reflector. At that time he concentrated upon solar and lunar work, and on joining the BAA in 1920 he almost immediately published a paper on the subject of lunar craters.

In 1924 he joined the Southampton Astronomical Society very shortly after its formation, beginning an association with that society which was to be lifelong. At the time of the Society's 50th anniversary celebrations, he was the only one of the early members to be still fully active in astronomy. He served on the Committee for a large number of years and in various capacities, and was President at the time of his death in 1976 June.

Although maintaining a keen interest in astronomy, his numerous other commitments prevented him from being particularly active on the observational side until after the Second World War. In 1953 he established an

observatory at his home in Winchester which was initially equipped with a 305 mm reflector on loan from the BAA. This was later replaced by a similar instrument of his own, augmented by various smaller telescopes. In the following years he made up for lost time, contributing large numbers of observations to the Association. Although taking part in the solar, lunar and cometary programmes, he concentrated upon the planets, all of which he observed. For a great many years his drawings and photographs regularly formed part of the Exhibition Meetings. He was a meticulous observer and his notes show his concern to obtain the best optical and mechanical performance from his equipment. He developed a great interest in observing methods and accessories and published a number of papers and letters on such subjects in the *Journal*.

In 1961 he became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and in 1964 he was elected to the Council of the Association for the first time, serving on this body for five years before becoming Secretary in 1970. For three years he gave the same scrupulous care to the recording and refereeing of contributed papers as he showed in his observational work. The increasing pressure of other work for the Association caused him to resign the Secretaryship, but he served a further two terms on Council as Vice-President.

The majority of members of the Association will doubtless best remember Alf Curtis for the essential part which he played in organizing the exceptionally successful Winchester Weekend Courses in Observational Astronomy. It was due to his careful preparations and sheer hard work over ten years that these Courses became so popular, with the number of participants rising from 56 in 1967 to 242 in 1976.

He was also well-known to numerous persons outside the BAA through the lectures which he gave to astronomical societies in various parts of the country, concentrating upon the planetary and photographic work which were his greatest interests. He was a staunch advocate of amateur observation, stressing not just its scientific merit, but also the immense pleasure which it could give. He was always ready to welcome the individuals and educational groups who visited his observatory, going to great pains to give them as much enjoyment and instruction as he could.

His interests were not confined to astronomy, being a keen movie photographer and a skilled player of bowls and billiards. He also had a great love for music and played the violin himself, regularly performing chamber music with a small group of Winchester friends.

He will be remembered by all who knew him for the way in which he followed the great astronomical tradition of giving unstinted help to those who needed it, and for his sincerity and kindness.