

Obituaries

Alan Young 1936–1990

Alan Young, a very active observer and astrophotographer died on February 6th at the age of 53. He was born in Enfield, Middlesex on March 23rd 1936 and was educated at Chesterfield School. He was an engineer by profession and had a special interest in building components for racing car engines and also constructed racing motor bikes and side cars. This skill was also used to good effect in the construction of his own observatory, initially in Hemingford Abbots and more recently re-sited at Burwash, close to the Royal Greenwich Observatory. He expanded this talent to build a number of observatories throughout the UK.

The Burwash Observatory housed a 0.57-m reflector, which was primarily used for astrophotography. He became proficient at treating films with the hypering process, and the combination of sensitized film and the large aperture of the telescope, enabled very faint limiting magnitudes to be reached, especially in the favourable skies of Sussex.

Much of his work involved obtaining photographs of star fields in which observers had claimed discoveries had been made. Although often these claims were in error and long exposures revealed no new object, he never refused to help with investigations. On one occasion, he investigated the observation of a possible nova in Scutum (later designated Nova Scuti 1981) which seemed to fade rapidly below the visual limit of amateur telescopes. Although the object was not confirmed, the photograph reached approximately magnitude 20, comparable to the Palomar Sky Survey.

His particular interest was in photography of supernovae and extending the light curves to faint limits, which was an area he correctly recognized had been seriously neglected. His work on Supernova 1980K was especially valuable with photographs providing data covering the fade to magnitude 17. Always willing to respond to appeals for help, he also became involved in astrometry of supernovae, comets and asteroids, for which

the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams in the United States of America were constantly in need. He carried out several measures of P/Comet Halley.

He also showed considerable patience and understanding in dealing with those just starting out in their observing careers. He played a valuable role in this respect as Astrophotography Advisor to the Junior Astronomical Society.

His very fine work has been much admired throughout the world, often by astronomers who had never met him but had seen the high quality photographs published in various journals.

He will be greatly missed as a friend who was always reliable and above all very sincere. Astronomy has suffered a great loss as there are few who build large telescopes and then go on to use them to their full ultimate potential, which was his greatest strength.

Guy M. Hurst