

Obituary

BEN BLRRELL: 1903-1983

Born in London on 1903 March 9, Ben Burrell was the son of a chemist who, while Ben was still a small boy, moved north to the Yorkshire town of Doncaster, and opened a chemist shop there. Educated at Doncaster Grammar School, Ben became interested in the night sky and as most boys do, read all the books on astronomy that were available in those early days.

He gained his School Certificate in 1918, and moved on to the Technical College to study Mechanical Engineering where he was awarded National and the City and Guilds of London certificates in Mechanical Engineering in 1924, and continued his practical training at the local locomotive works of the London and North Eastern Railway. He became a member of the Doncaster Scientific Society and took up a study of photography and then, having built his own 75 mm equatorial refractor, he commenced to apply his knowledge of photography to astronomical events such as comets and lunar eclipses with success. This encouraged him to experiment in colour photography, then in its early stages of development, applying it chiefly to lunar events, again with great success, so much that he was hailed by the film manufacturers as being the first man successfully to photograph the totally eclipsed Moon in colour. His pictures were shown on all the cinema screens in the country in the newsreels which were popular features in those days. He continued his photographic work through the blackout imposed during the 1939-45 war, obtaining many successful results on comets and auroral displays which were seen to advantage at that time, becoming very experienced in the field. At this time he was appointed chief technical photographer to the London and North Eastern railway company, a position he held until his retirement.

Having joined the BAA in 1932 and elected a Fellow of the RAS about two years later, Ben extended his observational activities to visual studies of the planets with a 215 mm reflector he had built himself, supplemented with a 254 mm on loan from the Association, and he did much valuable work in this field. He was appointed assistant to



Photograph of Mr Fox (*right*) and the late Mr Burrell (*left*).

the Director of the Mars Section, devoting much time to the movements of the 'dust storms' and changes in the appearance of various features observed on the planet, in addition to regular contributions to the Jupiter and Saturn Sections.

Ben became a prominent member of the Leeds Astronomical Society, and served a term as its President. He also devoted many years to lecturing on astronomy for the Workers Educational Association, regularly giving courses in South Yorkshire towns, and, probably the best of all from the social relationship point of view, Wakefield Prison, where he appeared to be most popular.

Ben Burrell was married in 1934 and had two daughters, Brenda and Miriam, but his wife, whose health had been failing for a long time, died in 1980. By this time his own health was not good, causing him to limit his physical activities and cease attending any astronomical meetings for a long time, but when the BAA held a special meeting of the newly formed Doncaster Astronomical Society in 1983 August, he made a special effort to attend, when those of us who knew him were delighted to see him once again. Unfortunately, it was for the last time, for he passed away on 1983 September 27 after a long membership of the Association, lasting for 51 years.

We mourn the death of a good friend; an amateur astronomer in the true sense of the word, and pass on to his two daughters and grandson and grand-daughter our sympathy and condolences in their loss.

W. E. Fox