

Bruce Holcombe Hardie, 1922-1999

Amateur astronomers throughout Britain and Ireland, and further afield, were greatly saddened at the sudden death of Bruce Hardie, Director of the BAA Solar Section and past President of the Irish Astronomical Association, who died peacefully on 25 June aged 77. He had had an operation for a malignancy in a kidney in 1992, after which he regained his health, but in June the condition recurred and he gradually declined, although he maintained his sense of humour until the end. He slipped away peacefully, with his family at his bedside.

Bruce was best known as a solar astronomer, but his interests extended to all aspects of astronomy, and he was still quite prepared to indulge in a spot of late night meteor observing even when well into his seventies.

Bruce Hardie was born in 1922 in London. His interest in astronomy began with the Cub Scouts in the early 30s in Surrey. They had a small telescope, and unsurprisingly Saturn was one of his favourite objects. He often recalled the gloriously dark skies of those years, the great winter meteor showers, and that when he first looked through a telescope Pluto had still to be discovered! His interest in astronomy lasted through his spell in the Scouts; then aerial photography in the RAF in World War II took him to South Africa where he enjoyed the magnificent Southern skies, and then to Egypt where visits to Heliopolis and Helwan observatory kindled his interest in the Sun. He worked in the Air Ministry, before joining Fisons. He married Eileen in 1948, and they had four children. His interest in the Sun grew further in the late 1950s when he moved to Suffolk. Observing right through Solar Cycle 19 (the most active on record), he became friendly with the then Director of the Solar Section, Bill Baxter, who encouraged his interest in solar photography.

Bruce moved to Northern Ireland in 1964 to take over as Head of the BBC N.I. Film Unit. He was responsible for the coverage of many of the dramatic and significant events of the 'Troubles' of the late Sixties, Seventies, and early Eighties - a role which he performed with distinction. In fact he built up the unit to a level of professionalism where it was respected throughout the country and abroad, leading a team who still express their admiration and respect for his work. He also served on the Arts Council for Northern Ireland for many years.

Bruce's growing expertise as a solar observer was recognised by the BAA when they appointed him as Director of the Solar Section in 1989, a position he held until his sudden death. An assiduous observer, he



Bruce Hardie at a joint Solar Section/CU AS meeting in Cambridge, 1990. *Photo: Alan Heath*

was also an expert photographer and many readers will have marveled at the quality of the solar photographs taken with his 5-inch (126mm) refractor. He took his directorial duties very seriously, building up the Section to a healthy active group, with many members in at least 18 countries as well as the UK, indicating the high respect in which he was held by observers here and in other countries. He also faithfully produced the Section reports for the *Journal*, and lately the Section's own Newsletter, right until the end.

Brace had also joined the Irish Astronomical Association, and after retiring as head of the BBC Film Unit was able to devote a lot more time to its activities. He was always keen to encourage budding astronomers, and showed great patience and understanding of those whose interest was as yet unmatched by their knowledge or proficiency. He was soon appointed Observing Section Director, then Vice President, and was elected President of the IAA in 1991. He was awarded the IAA's 'Aidan P. Fitzgerald Award' for Outstanding Service to the Association' in 1994.

Brace also gave lectures and wrote articles for the BAA, IAA and other societies, - not just on the Sun and Eclipses, but on subjects as diverse as photography, astronomical equipment, meteors and the astronomy of the Native Americans in New Mexico.

Brace was a great eclipse chaser, having

observed those of 1948 (Zanzibar), 1952 (Egypt), 1974 (W. Australia), 1976 (Turkey), 1983 (Java), 1984 (Morocco), 1988 (Mindanao), 1990 (Finland), 1991 (Baja California), 1994 (Annular, New Mexico) and 1998 (Curacao). He was naturally looking forward to 1999 August 11: his original plan was to travel through Central Europe meeting many of his solar observer colleagues in various countries, finishing in Hungary to observe the eclipse from there. Declining health had forced him to abandon that plan, but he had still hoped to observe the eclipse from southern England.

Two hundred members stood in silence to remember Bruce at the recent Exhibition meeting, where the news of his death was announced. The President commented that Bruce had re-built the Solar Section over the last ten years and that his two-part report on the last Solar Cycle was one of the most remarkable pieces of work ever published in the *Journal*.

Bruce would not have wished anyone to mourn his death - his advice would have been to open a bottle of champagne, drink a toast, and enjoy oneself! I'm sure that one of his final wishes would have been for clear skies for his many friends and fellow astronomers in Cornwall and all along the eclipse track, and anyone so blessed should remember an outstanding solar observer, a true amateur astronomer, and a real gentleman.

I was honoured when the family invited me to pay a tribute to Bruce at the funeral. I expressed sympathy on behalf of all the members of the British Astronomical Association and the Irish Astronomical Association. I hoped that the verse below expressed how I think of him. It is a funeral poem from the Indians of Southwest USA, and I thought of it when I re-read one of his articles about the Ananzani astronomers: it refers to a burial, rather than a cremation, but the sentiments are the same.

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awake in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight;
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry
I am not there - I did not die.'

Bruce Hardie is survived by his wife Eileen, sons Dean, Paris and Piers, and daughter Shelley, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

Terry Moseley