

**OBITUARIES**

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**WILLIAM MORLEY BAXTER**

It is with deep sorrow that we must record the death of William Morley Baxter, by whose passing we have lost the services of our leading and most gifted amateur solar astronomer.

Born on 1896 November 30 at Brighton, Sussex, he was the son of John Walters and Elizabeth Emma Baxter, and during his formative years revealed a glimpse of his later interests by the making of his first simple telescope from odd glasses and cardboard tubing. This passion for gadgetry persisted throughout his school days, and from 1912 to 1915 he received the final touches to his education at Brighton Municipal Technical College, where he qualified as an electrical and mechanical engineer. In July 1915 he enlisted in the R.N.A.S. and spent the war years on airship construction. On demobilization in January 1919 he was to find himself in a society having little to offer the ex-Serviceman, as an industry geared to the products of war came to a grinding halt. Later that year, when in Dundee, a chance remark set him thinking and within two weeks he had purchased a one-way ticket: Christmas Eve found him on the high seas to seek 'fame and fortune' in India. After several years of valuable experience both as an engineer and administrator, he returned to England by March 1927, and following a brief holiday joined the London branch of his parent firm.

In 1928 he married Ivy Kathleen Hardy and they moved into their new home at Acton, in London.

He was elected a Member of the Association on 1932 March 30, and this is when an earlier and diligent application to his hobby brought immediate dividends; for already he had a sound knowledge of basic astronomy. In the summer of 1933 he located and purchased the telescope best suited to his needs—an exceedingly fine equatorially-mounted 100 mm Cooke refractor—and in three months had installed it in a newly-erected observatory. Essentially a quiet and modest man, it could not then have been known that in him the Association had gained a member of exceptional ability: one who, in later years, was to astonish and delight his colleagues with numerous photographs of sunspot-groups and the solar limb prominences.

The outbreak of hostilities in 1939 brought about the evacuation of his firm to Dorking, Surrey, and obliged him to leave his Acton home for the duration. He installed a Newtonian reflector at his temporary home and continued with his observing and photographic experiments whenever possible. In October 1941 he gave the first of his many lectures on astronomy. Following the cessation of hostilities in Europe, he returned to Acton and to the pleasure of using his beloved Cooke refractor; though now he was to widen his already considerable experience by indulging in both spectroscopy and microscopy and, as always, sought to gain further knowledge and understanding through practical applica-

tion, never content to limit himself solely to reading. From 1949 to 1956 he travelled extensively abroad on behalf of his firm, and a year later retired from a highly successful business career; able, at last, to devote his remaining years to his hobbies and to the Association.

Coincidental with his retirement came the introduction of sodium street lighting in his locality, which was to have some influence on his decision to concentrate on solar astronomy. He was admitted to the Solar Section as a new member in September 1958, but the inclusion of a magnificent sunspot photograph in the *Journal* of February 1959 must have dispelled any possible doubts as to his ability, and thereafter the *Journal* was to feature a great number of such photographs. Many future Meetings of the Association were not thought of as complete unless he had delivered one of his refreshingly simple chats on solar activity and had showed one or more of his latest photographs.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in December 1959, and in 1961 was appointed as a Secretary for the Association, an office he discharged admirably until his resignation at the beginning of 1964, when it became necessary for him to plan ahead for an extensive tour of the United States. The year 1963 had seen the publication of his book, *The Sun and the Amateur Astronomer*, and in April he had taken delivery of a prominence telescope constructed for him by Mr Horace Dall. Immediate success with this beautiful instrument was not anticipated and in general he continued to rely on his favourite D.V. prominence diffraction spectroscope pending the availability of a suitable filter for the more sophisticated instrument. During his tour of the United States he purchased two all-dielectric filters of 4Å bandwidth and by early 1965 commenced regular observation of the limb prominences with the special telescope. By October 1964 he had assumed the Directorship of the Solar Section, and in the years to follow was to stand in as Acting Secretary and to become a Vice-President. On 1967 May 31 he was presented with the Merlin Medal and Gift for his outstanding work as a solar astronomer.

The year 1971 was to be as eventful as any previous, for he had become aware of an increasing demand for the re-issue of his book, and, encouraged by Mr Patrick Moore, set about the task of revision, which he completed by the end of September. But the illness that was to culminate in his death had already made itself felt, back in July. If he suspected the worst—and this is not known—then he was never to mention it in his correspondence, beyond alluding to his annoying chest pains. On October 29 he travelled to Bristol, to deliver his eighty-seventh (and last) lecture to a local astronomical society. By now he was seldom free from pain, sometimes acute, and yet he continued dealing with the affairs of the Solar Section until sheer exhaustion was to keep him away from his study and typewriter. He died peacefully in his sleep on 1971 December 9.

'Bill' Baxter's mode of living was exemplary; his marriage the ideal partnership. Astronomers everywhere will mourn the loss of a fine colleague and gentleman, and the sympathy of all will go out to Mrs Baxter and their daughter, Pauline.

M. R. WHIPPEY