

Charles Chilton, 1917–2013

For BAA members 'of a certain age', the name Charles Chilton is forever associated with happy childhood evenings by the fire, as BBC radio's *Journey into Space* and its sequels *The Red Planet* and *The World in Peril* carried us away from dull 1950s Britain to other worlds and who knew what exciting futures. Charles joined the BAA in 1952 and remained a member until his death at the age of 95 on January 2 this year.

Charles Frederick William Chilton was born on 1917 June 15, son of a clerk in St Pancras, London; his 19-year old father was killed at Arras and never saw his newborn son. His mother died when he was 5 as the result of a botched (illegal) abortion, and Charles was brought up by his paternal grandmother. He left school as

soon as possible at the age of 14; the story tells that one morning in 1932 he was walking past the BBC's new headquarters at Broadcasting House and asked the commissionaire if there were any jobs going.

Joining the Corporation first as a messenger, he soon moved to the creative side and discovered a love of music, particularly jazz, and helped to present and produce his own late night radio shows. He joined the RAF in 1941 as an air gunner, but was soon assigned to a training role, instructing aircrew on navigating by the stars, which developed his interest in astronomy and space.

Chilton's 46-year career in BBC Radio encompassed writing, producing or directing many

of the most well-known programmes of the era, including *Riders of the Range*, which originated from a trip to America to research the music of the Wild West for the Corporation. His *Journey into Space* trilogy ran from 1953 to 1958 and attracted an audience of over five million devotees, remarkable for the time.

In 1961, remembering the father that he never knew, Chilton wrote and produced a musical documentary called *The Long Long Trail* based on the songs and events of the First World War. This transferred to the stage, and later a film, as *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, a bitter satirical commentary on the realities of war which still has powerful resonance today.

Charles Chilton married Penelope Colbeck, a secretary at the BBC, in 1947. They had a daughter and two sons, all of whom, with Penelope, survive him. He was created MBE for services to radio in 1972.