

## ERIC MERVYN LINDSAY

By the sudden death of Dr Eric Lindsay, Director of the Armagh Observatory, we lose one of the greatest of all popularizers of astronomy—and also an eminent theoretical researcher.

Eric Lindsay was born in 1907, in the Northern Ireland town of Portadown. He was educated at the King's Hospital School in Dublin and at Queen's University, Belfast. He then went to Harvard University, and took his degrees under Dr Harlow Shapley—who remained one of Lindsay's closest friends for the rest of his long life. (They had a great deal in common, notably much the same very marked sense of humour.) In 1934 Lindsay was appointed chief assistant astronomer at the Boyden Observatory, near Bloemfontein in South Africa, and it was here that much of his own observational research was done. He specialized in studies of the Magellanic Clouds, and during his spell at Boyden he published a series of important papers.

In 1935 he married Sylvia Mussells, of Boston (herself an astronomer), and could have settled for a long, profitable research career at Boyden. Instead, he was faced with a challenge. The observatory at Armagh, not far from Portadown, had been through difficult times, and with the death of the Director, the Rev. W. F. A. Ellison, Lindsay was asked to return to his homeland. In 1937 he came back—to find a rather depressing situation. The only telescope of any size, the Armagh 254 mm refractor, needed renovating. There was no scientific staff, and indeed no papers had been published from Armagh for many years. Yet with his usual skill and energy, Lindsay soon altered matters. He was able to obtain an increased Government grant; he bought new equipment; he was then in a position to engage at least a skeleton staff, and, of course, he continued with his own research, though inevitably he concentrated more on pure theory and less on sheer observation. Everything was going on as planned when the war broke out, and for some years astronomy took a minor place. Eric Lindsay had other qualifications besides astronomical ones, and he became a 'backroom boy'; his work took him to places as far afield as Washington and Cyprus.

At the end of the war, Lindsay, back at Armagh, continued with his plans. He was well aware of the need for international co-operation, and also the need for concentration on the southern sky; where best to centre these activities than Boyden? Harlow Shapley was in full agreement. After an incredible amount of work, Lindsay was able to obtain the agreement of the two Irish Governments to contribute £5000 each to a new project; Harvard joined in, so did the Swedes, the Belgians and the West Germans. The Armagh-Dunsink-Harvard or ADH Telescope was set up at Boyden, where it has since operated continuously on a fully international basis. For the rest of his life the Boyden results provided Lindsay with all he needed for his theoretical research.

By the mid-1960s, many of Lindsay's immediate ambitions had been fulfilled. From being obscure and ill-equipped, Armagh Observatory had regained its energy and its eminence; the link with South Africa was fruitful and smooth; at Armagh itself all was going well. There was, moreover, another side to his character. He was an astronomical educator, and he knew well that the teenage beginner of today is the researcher of tomorrow. Lindsay was an excellent lecturer (though he did not really enjoy public speaking), and it was entirely due to him that astronomy has become a popular subject in Northern Ireland. In the 1950s he had considered the idea of a Planetarium, and he spent many years in working on the scheme. The Planetarium finally opened in 1967, and Eric Lindsay was at the first showing when I had the honour to give the inaugural display. Today, despite the troubles in Northern Ireland, the Planetarium continues to flourish; there is a new hall of astronomy attached to it—named, appropriately, the Lindsay Hall.

Eric Lindsay never spared himself, despite uncertain health. His death in 1974, as a result of a heart attack, came as a severe shock to his friends—of which he had many; I doubt whether he could have had any enemies. He was equally eminent as an observer, a theorist, an organizer and an educator; he will be badly missed. His work lives on.

PATRICK MOORE