

OBITUARY

ROWDON MARRIAN FRY: 1896-1980

With the sudden death on 1980 June 4 of Dr R. M. Fry, MRCS, LRCP, in his eighty-fourth year, the Association has lost one of its most senior members and one who, though not well known to younger astronomers, served it well in earlier years.

Fry (he disliked both of his given names and was known to all his friends simply by his surname) was born on 1896 July 8, and had originally intended to follow his father's profession as an architect. In 1914, however, he enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment and it was perhaps a long period in hospital, following a serious arm injury in the battle of the Somme in 1916, that turned his thoughts to the study of medicine. He qualified in 1922 and thereafter entered upon a distinguished medical career, working first as a bacteriologist in Sir Almroth Wright's department at St Mary's Hospital, and then moving in 1931 to Queen Charlotte's Hospital as assistant director of the Bernhard Baron Research Laboratories. Here, in the 1930s, he was engaged in the clinical testing and introduction into routine practice of the new sulphonamide drugs, with triumphantly successful results in the treatment of such streptococcal infections as puerperal fever.

The Second World War took him to the Emergency Public Health Service, first to Gloucester and then for five years as Director at Carmarthen. In 1946 he was appointed to take charge of the Regional Public Health Laboratory in Cambridge, and there he remained until his 'retirement' in 1963—of which more shortly. The Cambridge Laboratory was closely linked, in a rather unusual way, with the University Department of Pathology. The combination of public service, teaching and research was a source of great reward to Fry, and there is equally no doubt that the success of the relation between the two bodies stemmed largely from his personal qualities of ability, wisdom and friendliness. Characteristically, on retirement he immediately took over another job, and for the remaining 17 years of his life he edited the *Journal of Hygiene* for the Cambridge University Press: he had been at work, as usual, at his editorial desk in the Pathology Department, apparently his usual cheerful and enthusiastic self, earlier in the day that he died.

Fry became interested in astronomy when at Merchant Taylors' School and he was elected a member of the Association on 1913 February 26. "Now there were giants on the Earth in those days" and Fry had known personally, and had many interesting recollections of, some of the great

amateurs who were the Association's founder members. Although his exacting professional career restricted his own observing, he maintained a small observatory for many years, contributing regular observations of variable stars made first with a 100 mm refractor and later with a telescope passed on to him by the film actor and amateur astronomer Will Hay, who was one of his many friends. This same telescope he himself in turn later presented to another young amateur astronomer (as he also passed on to me his valued early volumes of the *English Mechanic*), being, as he said, more concerned to "find a good home for things" than to make money by their sale. This generous quality of his he once told me he had himself known and admired in many of the Association's early members.

He served on the Council at various times in the 1930s, as he did also on the Council of the RAS, and published one or two papers on the adjustment of instruments. But his greatest service to the Association was undoubtedly his eight-year editorship of this *Journal*. In 1936 the then Editor, Peter Doig, was in poor health and Fry had understudied him, to succeed as Editor in 1937. He brought to the office (as the publishers of the *Journal of Hygiene* were later to discover) most of the qualities that a good journal editor needs: tact, firmness, sound judgement, punctuality, good humour and friendliness in dealing alike with author, editorial board and printer. In retrospect one can see how important to the Association the *Journal* was through the war years: in anxious days with few able to attend meetings held in an embattled London, and with many meetings cancelled, the *Journal* became the effective existence of the Association for most of its scattered members. Despite his wartime duties, Fry at first continued the editorship alone, but his absence from London made the task impossible and F. J. Sellers joined him as Acting Honorary Editor. Between them, despite difficulties of printing and shortage of paper, they kept the *Journal* appearing with remarkable regularity, and 40 years later the Association has still reason to be grateful for their devotion.

Fry's life was a full one, and he passed it in a quiet enjoyment of all the things there were to do. In each of his many activities he gathered around himself little groups of friends who shared his enthusiasms. As well as astronomy he liked gardening, country walking, fishing, conversation and, not least, driving cars (rather fast). He had learned to drive in the streets of London as a young man and, 60 years later, he was still navigating them with the aplomb of a London taxi driver, as often as not chatting happily the while with the friends who were his passengers and for whom the experience was, to say the least, exhilarating. It was also in keeping with his character that he used his car unobtrusively to serve his friends: he often made a detour of miles—sometimes a special journey of hundreds of miles—to provide transport for an elderly or incapacitated colleague who would otherwise have been unable to attend some astronomical or

other function in London or elsewhere. He was a thoroughly kind and likeable man, and in their loss his many friends will extend condolences to his widow, three daughters and the younger generations of his family.

This short memoir has necessarily said little of Fry's important professional contributions to the world of medicine. I am grateful to Sir Graham Wilson, who allowed me to draw on an advance copy of his longer notice of Fry's medical work in the *Journal of Hygiene* [85, Pt 3 (1980)]; other notices have also appeared earlier in 1980 in *The Times* (June 10), the *Lancet* (June 28) and the *British Medical Journal* (June 28).

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