

Obituary

John Watson, 1914–2009

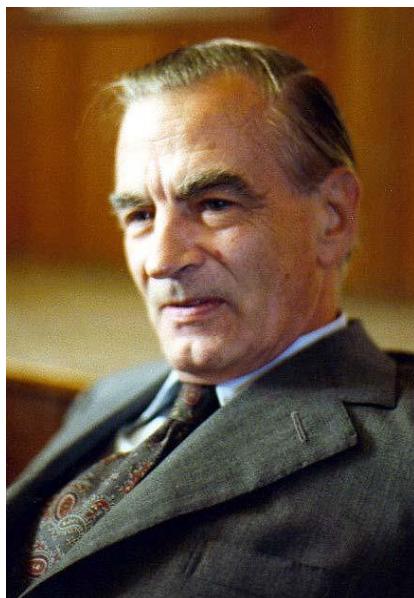
John Watson, who died on 2009 January 14 aged 94, was born on 1914 September 10. He started to display his multiple talents at an early age. In 1932, for example, he constructed an apparatus with which he was able to receive one of John Logie Baird's first television broadcasts, a feat that was reported in the *Times*. In addition, he once told Norman Walker that he had worked with Baird when Baird lived in Hastings, and had wound HT coils for him!

During WW2 he joined the Volunteer Reserve of the Royal Air Force and rose to the rank of Squadron Leader. Demobilised in 1945, he entered a course of study at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and qualified as a Fellow in 1947.

Later, he had the opportunity to train in plastic surgery under Sir Archibald McIndoe, who was a pioneering plastic surgeon. Upon completion of training, John was appointed to the Consultant staff of the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead and later to the London and Florence Nightingale Hospitals, and an Honorary Consultancy at the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers.

McIndoe had immense skill in cutting large sheets of skin of uniform thickness for grafting, using an open bladed Blair knife, and demanded similar skills from his trainees. John Watson realised that this was unlikely but, more importantly, that there were those who practised the technique infrequently and for whom a more 'user friendly' tool was needed. He later confessed that the design was 'revealed' to him whilst he peeled potatoes at the kitchen sink!

As Secretary to the East Grinstead Medical Research Trust Watson oversaw the planning, construction and commissioning of the most advanced facility in its time for the treatment of burn injuries. Furthermore, he was 'eminence gris' to the Trust as its laboratories rose to international fame in the fields of transplantation immunology and the birth of micro-vascular surgery. This was recognised by the award of Fellowship



of the Royal College of Surgeons of England *ad eundem*.

Surely, enough for one lifetime but room was also made for beekeeping, the construction of an orchid house and, most of all, astronomy.

He constructed his own 250mm Newtonian reflector, including grinding and polishing his own mirror, and mounted the instrument in his own purpose built observatory. Using his knowledge of computers and circuitry, he introduced a system of automation of his own design and manufacture in order to enter the field of photoelectric photometry at a professional level.

In 1988, he was asked to join the recently formed Stargazers Trust, a group dedicated to the promotion of serious amateur astronomy. He was instrumental in helping with the electronics for the Jack Ells automatic photoelectric telescope (*JBAA* 99(6), 282 (1989)) and also built a digital meter for the author's own photometry setup.

John was a keen and meticulous observer and was determined to get the best from his equipment. He was one of the first users of Norman Walker's JEAP photoelectric photometers and collaborated on a variety of projects with professional astronomers, most notably, Chris Lloyd (first at Herstmonceux and then at RAL). These were mostly on eclipsing binaries but he also tried to clarify the nature of some suspected variables, and followed up stars observed with the Jack Ells automatic photoelectric telescope.

He communicated a number of articles to the *Journal* (often with other amateurs and/or professionals) and to professional publications, usually on the subject of variable stars. However, his wider expertise was brought to the fore in an article in *JBAA* 97(6), 327–329 (1987) on making a sidereal clock.

I first met John in the early 1980s when two groups of us, Richard Miles and Andy Hollis in the north and Jack Ells and myself in the south, were experimenting with the technique of photoelectric photometry and John showed great interest.

He had a lovely sense of humour which is nicely encapsulated in this snippet of an email I still have from him from 2000 when he was 'only' 85. 'I had a mishap which led to a near encounter with the Great Reaper, having succeeded in falling down and fracturing my skull and giving myself a sub-dural haemorrhage over the brain. However I survived my hospital involvement with the modern NHS and am now fully recovered and back to my normal (85 year old) level again.'

John is survived by three daughters, Paulina, Carolyn and Charlotte.

I'm grateful to Paulina and to Tom Cochran for the non-astronomical background information given in this brief obituary.

Roger Pickard

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