

MISS LYDIA BROWN

Miss Lydia Alberta Brown, whose death was reported in the December issue of the *Journal*, was born at Clapham on 1903 March 10, the daughter of a Baptist minister. The family moved to West Hounslow in 1920, where Lydia lived for the next fifty years. She was appointed Assistant Librarian to the British Astronomical Association in 1928, having been introduced by the Treasurer, Mr Frank Robbins, a deacon of her church. In March 1931 she was made full-time Assistant Secretary, and the registered office and stockrooms for publications became an integral part of her home. For the next forty years she was the excellent administrator of the Association's affairs, justly earning the high commendation of successive Presidents and the enthusiastic endorsement of every Council.

During this long period, equivalent to half the existence of the Association, Miss Brown saw the membership grow from under 900 to over 4 000, and she gained a unique knowledge of the very many officers and members responsible for the progress of the various Sections and of their work. These included many eminent astronomical personalities, and she particularly valued her proposal for Fellowship of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1939 by its President, Sir Harold Spencer Jones. She expressed unfeigned gratitude and pleasure at the gesture of the Council in providing a place for her on the B.A.A. Eclipse Expedition to Sweden in 1954 in appreciation of the splendid manner in which she had performed her duties—and much beyond them—for twenty-three years.

She was for so long the central, permanent and continuing part of the Association to whom all in turn during their varying lengths of honorary service looked for guidance in the practical conduct of its functions as a corporate body. This was epitomized during the Council's dismayed deliberations on her impending retirement by a member's exclamation: "Miss Brown *is* the B.A.A.!" It is a matter of great regret that she was unable to carry out her intention to write a book of reminiscences, planned for her later years.

In spite of the enormous increase in the work of the Association from 1946 onwards, Miss Brown continued to handle all matters single-handed, with only occasional casual clerical assistance. With the prospect of approaching retirement and the consequent transfer of the office to other premises she declined the offer of a full-time assistant, and it is obvious now that she devoted practically all her time to the B.A.A. with no regard for normal working hours.

Just at the time when she was hoping to implement her plans for the efficient removal of the office to Burlington House and the initiation of the new Assistant Secretary she became seriously ill and underwent a drastic operation. She was unable to attend the October meeting of 1970 to receive a testimonial and

cheque for over £600, and they were accepted on her behalf by her brother Dean and handed by him to his sister the same evening as she lay in a grave condition in West Middlesex Hospital. She received hundreds of letters and messages from members, many of whom she had never met. All knew that in spite of the pressure on her time she was always kind, courteous and helpful to everyone at meetings, on the telephone and in letters and notes. Her personal charm undoubtedly encouraged a great many enquirers, especially the younger ones, to complete their application forms with enthusiasm.

To the great joy of all Miss Brown recovered, and in April 1971 she was able to fulfil her long-cherished wish to make a new home in a bungalow at Worthing. In July she came to London for the crowning event of her life, the Investiture at Buckingham Palace when she received from Her Majesty the Queen the Medal of Membership of the British Empire for services to astronomy, an occasion recorded in the October *Journal* with an excellent photograph which delighted so many of her admirers.

As a further expression of appreciation of her long service to the Association, Miss Brown was made a Life Member in May 1970. Although a 75 mm telescope stood for many years in her office, Miss Brown left herself no time for practical astronomy beyond the very laudable task of giving simple star talks to local groups of Girl Guides.

The progress of organized astronomy has been assisted in a great variety of ways. The contribution of Lydia Brown is recognized as of high merit in that through her work thousands of people were enabled the better to pursue their interest in astronomy. Perhaps the value of this particular contribution is emphasized by words from a passage by Giordano Bruno read at her funeral: "Thus by means of astronomy we shall certainly attain to that good which by other sciences is sought in vain".

J. L. WHITE