



Obituary

Maurice V. Gavin, 1934–2018

Maurice Victor Gavin was born in Parsons Green, Fulham, London on 1934 October 18, the youngest of six children of Emmeline and Thomas Gavin. The Second World War began just before Maurice started his schooling. Although the war disrupted his education he was able to attend a local school. He was always inquisitive, and attentive about the world around him.

Maurice stayed with his family at a time when other children were being evacuated to the country. During air raids he and his family would shelter in the crypt of their local church, St Dionis. When his mother passed away he went to live with her sister, his Aunt Jessie and uncle Harry. Before the end of the war they moved to a new housing estate in Tolworth, Surrey. Near the end of the war Maurice watched 'doodle-bugs' (flying bombs) going overhead towards London. He also remembered playing on the A3, during the days of petrol rationing when few cars were on the road. He went on to attend secondary school at Tolworth Boys School.

In 1949 aged 15, Maurice began working at the Milk Marketing Board as an architect's assistant. In the following years he completed his professional qualifications at night school and became a chartered architect. As a young man at the MMB he enjoyed and excelled at badminton, winning several trophies.

Maurice met his wife Barbara when they were both working at the MMB in Thames

Ditton, Surrey. Following their courtship they married in 1960, initially living with Barbara's family in Surbiton, later moving to Dorking in Surrey where Maurice was working.

Maurice and Barbara had three daughters, Carole, Janette and Julia. The family moved to Sutton for a short while when Maurice took up a post as an architect with Sutton Borough Council. Whilst there he worked on many projects ranging from the redevelopment of the Secombe Centre Theatre, schools for children with special needs and the Mill Hill housing estate.

In 1966 Maurice and his family moved to Worcester Park where he remained until his death. As a frustrated architect living in a 1930s semi-detached, walls came down and a couple of extensions went up; on one occasion his astronomy pals from the Ewell Astronomical Society were drafted in to wheelbarrow concrete for the foundations. Maurice remained at Sutton Borough Council for the rest of his working life and retired at the age of 58. Retirement gave him ample time to pursue his many interests.

Photography was one of Maurice's early pas-



sions and he took many photographs mostly of the family. He purposely built the downstairs bathroom to double up as a darkroom for developing films and printing. As a keen amateur astronomer he joined the Ewell Astronomical Society in 1968 having seen an advert in the local fish & chip shop. It was not long before he was elected onto the committee. The Society had decided to build its own observatory and Maurice being an architect got the job of carrying out the design and project managing

its construction, which was completed in 1972. He held many posts with the Society over the years including both Chairman and Secretary.

Maurice first joined the BAA in 1950 and rejoined in 1971, remaining a member until his death. He was President 1995–1997, Vice President 1997–1999 and a member of Council 1981–1984, 1985–1988, 1991–1994, 2000–2003 and 2004–2007. From 1984–1985 he also ran the Association's Micro-Computer Users Group.

He gave many talks to members of the Association and astronomical societies over the years, describing the techniques and equipment that he was using to encourage others to follow suit. He attended many meetings of the Association and



could regularly be seen in deep discussion with members offering help and advice.

Maurice was awarded the Merlin Medal and Gift by the Association in 2009 in recognition of 'a notable contribution to the advancement of astronomy', citing in particular that he was 'always the first to encourage and motivate others to develop their skills by demonstrating and communicating his work and achievements'.

Maurice was also a member of TA (*The Astronomer*). He submitted many images to the magazine, and gave several talks at TA AGMs ranging from observing the planets, deep sky, spectroscopy, computing and imaging.

In the early 1970s Maurice converted the garage at the bottom of his garden into an observatory and installed a 450mm Newtonian telescope. The optics he obtained from America but the rest of the telescope and the mount were home built. The Guildford to Waterloo railway passed not far from the observatory which caused some vibration when trains went past, so Maurice pinned a copy of the train timetable to the wall of the building so he knew when not to take images. The observatory was clearly visible to those travelling past in the trains and over the years became a recognised landmark on the line.

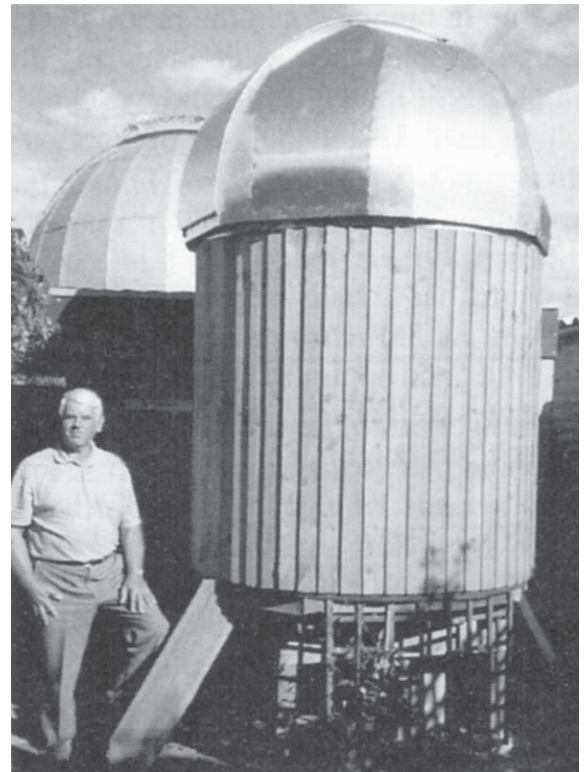
Computing was another great interest for Maurice. In the early 1980s he wrote a book (*ZX Spectrum Astronomy*) describing how amateurs could benefit from using emerging computer technology. This encouraged many to try it for themselves. Also in the early 1980s Maurice set up a publication for amateurs called *Apex* (Astro-computing Program Exchange), containing computer programs provided by himself and other contributors. This had a circula-

tion of about 300. During the time that it was published it provided an insight into using this new technology for astronomical means and encouraged amateurs to start using computers.

In later years Maurice was active on various internet forums where he was known as *Nytecam*. Over the years he always embraced developing technology and encouraged others to do the same. To this end in the 1990s he constructed a smaller observatory adjacent to the first and installed a computer-controlled 300mm SCT. When electronic imaging came along Maurice was keen to experiment with various cameras and equipment and by doing so motivated and encouraged others to follow suit.

At the time Maurice was also one of only a few amateurs using and developing techniques in spectroscopy. He was the first amateur to obtain a spectrum of supernova 1966bu in M96, and in 1998 he obtained a spectrum of Wolf-Rayet star HD1921163 in Cygnus. He obtained images and spectra of several quasars including Q1226+23 (2C273) and Q0014+813, demonstrating that the spectral lines were highly redshifted. In 2011 he discovered an extragalactic supernova, 2011az in IC3862, one of only a very few British amateurs to have done so.

Maurice Gavin was a man who showed infi-



Maurice Gavin with his home-built observatories in Surrey.

nite patience with newcomers, giving help and encouragement, and inspiring many others to follow in his footsteps. He was a good public speaker and liked to present to his peers at astronomical events and meetings, sharing knowledge and enthusiasm for deep sky observing, spectroscopy and imaging.

Maurice made a highly significant contribution to the field of amateur astronomy and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Ron Johnson



Maurice Gavin (far right) with four other ex-Presidents of the BAA, photographed at the BAA Winchester Weekend in 2004 April. From left: Tom Boles, Guy Hurst, Nick Hewitt, Martin Mobberley & Maurice Gavin. Photo by Martin Mobberley & Pete Seiden.



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