BAA Update

Obituary

Paul Doherty, 1947-1997

On 1997 November 26 Paul Doherty, so well known to all of us as one of the very best of astronomical artists, finally lost his long and brave battle against cancer. He had been ill for well over a year, and it was only his immense will-power which enabled him to survive for so long.

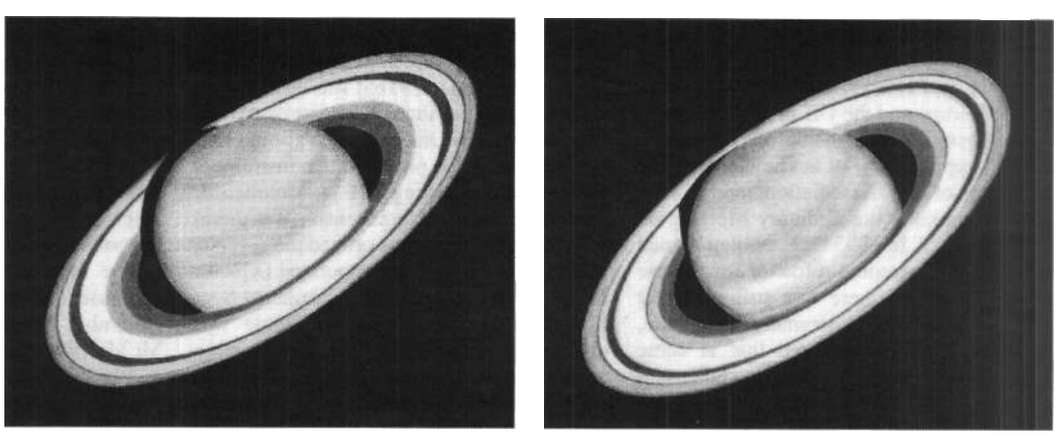
Paul was bom and brought up in Stoke-on-Trent, and spent all his life in or near the city. His father was a skilled amateur astronomer and Paul's interest was aroused early; he was soon making telescopic observations - and recording them. It was obvious from the start that he had exceptional artistic talent and the only sceptic was the art teacher at his school who told him bluntly that he had no future as an artist and had better look elsewhere. Fortunately, the young Paul was not convinced.

On leaving school Paul was a lithographic printer, then an insurance agent, before taking a post in the Civil Service, but he never pretended to be in the least bit interested in this type of employment; he was an artist first and foremost and in his teens he began illustrating astronomical books. He was also a practical observer, with a special interest in the planet Saturn. He joined the BAA and was for a time Assistant Director of the Saturn Section. His drawings were not only beautiful but remarkably accurate, and he had the advantage of exceptional eyesight - he was one of those rare people who could see the satellites of Jupiter without optical aid, and could pinpoint Venus even at noon when it was at a reasonable elongation from the Sun. He acquired a 16½-inch reflector and set it up in an observatory at Bode Heath, some miles from Stoke; following damage caused by a violent gale, he rebuilt the observatory but replaced the 16½-inch with a 10-inch reflector whose mirror was made by no less a person than Henry Wildey. That telescope was in use on every clear night.

In his mid-twenties it became clear that Paul would have to choose between a continuing career in the Civil Service, or chancing his luck as a professional artist and illustrator. He chose art, and it was a wise decision. During the 1950s he began producing artistic work for television, initially for the *Sky at Night* programme but then for many other programmes also. Neither was he limited to astronomical subjects. For example, he produced superb, lifelike representations of birds and Nature scenes in general, and also made excellent pictures of steam trains in which he was also very interested. He illustrated books on all subjects, and found time to write two books of his own: *Making and Using an Astronomical Observatory, and Atlas of the Planets.* At the time of his death he had just begun to revise the first of these books for its new edition. Sadly, this will now have to be published posthumously; it will appear early in 1998. Paul also made many contributions to scientific publications, including of course our own *Journal.*

But above all, perhaps, he will be remembered most for his portrayal of other worlds as they could well be. With his astronomical knowledge he was able to combine accuracy with artistry in a way which few others have been able to do. Chesley Bonestell was probably the first artist of this kind, and he has been followed by others, notably by David Hardy; Paul's work will stand comparison with any of these. Some time ago I looked at his impression of the surface of Mars as he expected it would be. The painting was done in 1963, before the first actual images from the Martian surface had been obtained; Paul's view is so strikingly like that of the Ares Vallis, that one might imagine that he had actually been there.

He was not afraid to use his imagination, as is shown by his impressions of other planetary systems, worlds orbiting binary stars, pulsars, even exploding novae. And he drew spacecraft - not only those travelling



Two drawings of Saturn made during the apparition of 1971. The south face of the rings and the southern face of the globe were favourably tilted towards the Earth. Activity is recorded in the planet's Equatorial Zone and South Equatorial Belt, and the rings display fine structure with Encke's division seen in Ring A. South is at the top. *Left:* 1971 September 2, Oh 30m UT. *Right:* 1971 Sept. 20, Oh 05m UT. 250mm refl. x250, P. B. Doherty. *(From the BAA Saturn Section archives; caption by David Graham.)*

between the planets but also those roaming far across the Galaxy and contacting the Trifid Nebula and the Andomeda Spiral. In the centuries to come it will be interesting to look back at his paintings and see how accurate his interstellar craft really were.

In his television work he was amazingly versatile. Ask him for an impression of a black hole, a probe inside Halley's Comet, or a landing in the chemical oceans of Titan and he would always be able to provide it. He was never at a loss.

His non-astronomical paintings have the same quality as those of celestial bodies: accuracy combined with delicacy and skill. Look at a Paul Doherty picture of a soaring eagle and you can almost see the flapping of the wings. Then, too, there were his line drawings which were of the highest standard. His last published work was in providing the charts for the *Photographic Atlas of the Stars* with photographs by H. J. P. Arnold published only a few months ago.

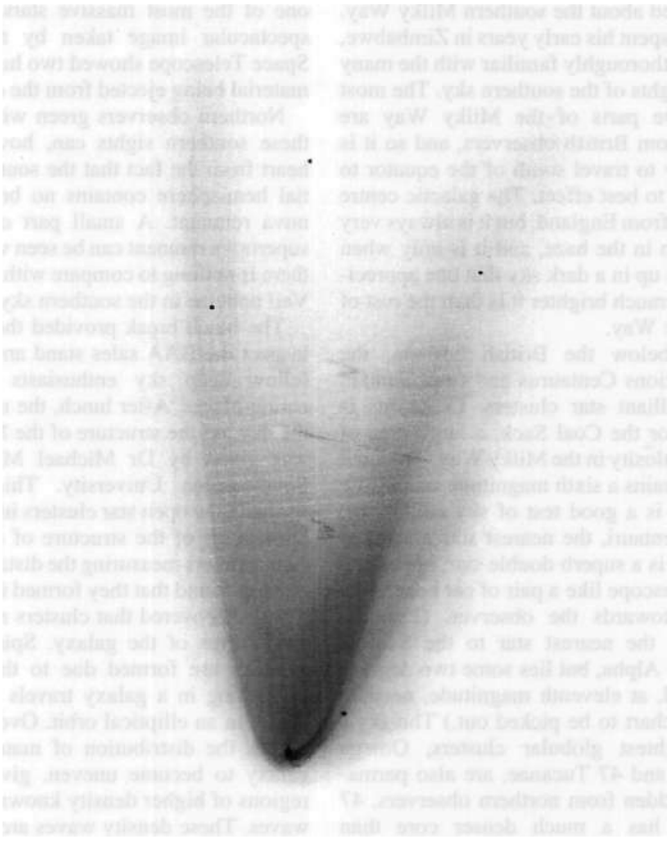
í Away from his work he had plenty of hobbies. He was an excellent guitarist and was in fact good enough to play professionally; at one time he was a member of a successful 'pop' group. For a while he dropped his active musical interests simply because he was too busy but during the past few years he had returned to them and his group had re-formed. He was also an amateur actor - and always took part in the local pantomime for the children. Despite his moustache, which had to be carefully hidden, he generally took the part of the dame.

In 1969 he married Linda and the marriage was ideally happy. Paul and Linda had two children, Nicola and Christopher. Life was not always easy. At the age of twelve, Nicola had a heart transplant which luckily proved to be completely successful, and at seventeen Chris was knocked down by a lorry and injured so badly that for a while his recovery was in doubt. It was some months before he was back to his normal health. Chris has inherited his father's artistic ability, though as a photographer rather than a painter.

The Dohertys were an exceptionally close family, and it goes without saying that Paul's death has been devastating. Cancer wjas first diagnosed two years ago; he survived one major operation but in the end a second cancer proved too much. If anyone could have come through it would have been Paul; moreover he never complained and never lost his sense of humour.

He leaves a gap which cannot be filled. But though Paul is no longer with us, neither he nor his work will be forgotten.

Patrick Moore



Comet Hale-Bopp with 8x40 binoculars, drawn by Paul Doherty on 1997 February 26 at 04.20 UT. *(Courtesy Linda Doherty)*

Meeting of the Deep Sky Section

held on 1997 November 15 at the Humfrey Rooms, Castilian Terrace, Northampton

The 1997 meeting of the Deep Sky Section attracted a healthy turnout of members and friends at Northampton, a popular venue for BAA Section meetings. The meeting was opened by the Section Director, Nick Hewitt, who said that much had happened on the deep sky scene since the Section's last meeting in March 1996, despite the distraction provided by the spectacular appearance of Comet Hale-Bopp. In particular, there had been three supernova discoveries by British amateurs, two of whom were Section members. The Section now had its own Web page and a greatly improved newsletter. On the observational side, CCDs were still dominating, but good visual work was also very much in evidence.

The first main talk of the meeting was given by Karen Holland, a BAA member who is involved in several astronomical projects at Leicester University. She described two of these projects. The first was photometry of red supergiant stars in the Perseid Double Cluster. The original aim was to see if these stars had a period-luminosity relationship like Cepheid variables. Eight stars were monitored over a period of six years, using a 16-inch telescope and CCD camera at Leicester University. It was found that the stars were brightest and hottest when their radii were largest - the opposite to the Cepheids. The second project was a hunt for possible brown dwarf stars in the Praesepe cluster in Cancer. This involved comparing optical measurements of the mass of the cluster with theoretical models to see if any invisible matter existed in the cluster. Brown dwarfs would be invisible matter, since they would be too faint to see at the distance of Praesepe. So far, the Leicester team had not found any evidence for brown dwarfs in the cluster, although other researchers using the same method had discovered that brown dwarfs may well exist in the Pleiades.

The second speaker was Richard Fleet,