



Obituary

Peter Terence Grego (1965–2016)

The sudden and untimely death of Peter Grego, who passed away on 2016 August 7, has deprived British amateur astronomy of one of its best-known characters. A gifted visual observer, innovative astronomical artist and prolific author, Peter carved a distinctive niche for himself in the field of popular astronomy. He wrote many introductory guides, mainly about the Moon and planets, and these attracted a wide and appreciative readership. He also contributed frequently and productively to the popular astronomy press, including regular and long-standing features in the monthly magazine *Astronomy Now*. That he was able to achieve this by the comparatively early age of 50 is testament to the boundless enthusiasm that had led him to take up astronomy as a child.

Peter Terence Grego was born at Sorrento Maternity Hospital, Birmingham, on 1965 December 6. Of Italian stock, he liked to inform people that he was from Sorrento, and his father's family had indeed set out from that area of Italy when they moved to Britain in the first years of the twentieth century, settling in the Italian community in central Birmingham. By the middle of the century, a branch of the family was living a few miles to the south, in Tyseley, and here Peter was raised, the second of four children. Too young to be part of that generation which claimed inspiration from *Apollo*, he nonetheless had vague recollections as a three-year-old of the exploits of Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins, though later in life he was keen to make clear distinctions between astronomy and spaceflight. He was given a 60mm refractor as a child, the ubiquitous starter telescope of the day. This he would set up in his bedroom window. In



the 1990s, an elderly resident of the area told him that a previous occupant of the house, by the name of Kilsby, had used a telescope from that same window many years earlier.

Peter's childhood was touched by tragedy when, in his early teens, he was present when his father Terry suffered a fatal heart attack at the age of only 48.

A highlight of Peter's early observing was a brilliant fireball, but his object of choice was invariably the Moon. By the early 1980s he had produced his own map of the Moon to a scale of 90cm to the lunar diameter. He joined the Birmingham Astronomical Society at sixteen, and here he made a 150mm f/10 Newtonian under the guidance of Tom Collier, which he mounted as a Dobsonian. With a tube painted in the livery of the Italian tricolour, it gave superlative views of the Moon and planets. Peter habitually used a power of only $\times 120$ on this instrument, but he possessed acute vision, save for a blind spot on the retina of his right eye, the legacy of a failed solar filter on his small refractor. The warnings about solar observation in his later articles thus carried the weight of personal experience.

Peter became Junior Section Co-ordinator for the society, then Observing Director, contributing articles to their journal and working on their ill-fated West Hills observatory. He was given the use of a member's 175mm Cooke refractor located near the Edgbaston cricket ground, the dome of which was sometimes visible in live broadcasts. A lifelong non-driver, he would trek across the south of the city in the small hours on foot to take advantage of the privilege.

Nobody who knew Peter will forget his unique sense of humour. Sharing a birthday with Will Hay, that personification of astronomy and comedy, Peter was something of an authority on early twentieth-century entertainers he could not possibly have seen first-hand. His own humour was of a decidedly practical nature and he was a gifted caricaturist, but he always had the humility to ensure that such caricatures included himself.

Having left his local grammar school with 'A' levels in art and geology, Peter was offered a place at Bourneville College of Art, but chose

instead to study in the art department of the then Solihull Technical College. His first, brief, job was as a clerk for British Rail. Unable to settle, he turned again to study, this time to be a psychiatric nurse at All Saints Hospital, Birmingham. By the time he had qualified there, he had met his future wife Tina.

Within a few years, writing for periodicals was taking up an increasing proportion of his life. His first book, *Collision Earth*, appeared in 1998, and it was inevitable that he would turn to writing full-time. The author of over 20 books in all, his most familiar were probably *Philips' Moon Observer's Guide* (2003) and *The Moon and How to Observe It* (Springer, 2005).

A longstanding member of the JAS/SPA, Peter directed their Lunar Section from 1984, and was to go on to edit their journal *Popular Astronomy* for fifteen years from 2000. Within the BAA, which he joined in 1987, he served as Assistant Director of the Lunar Section, editing the monthly *Circular* and promoting topographical studies with the introduction of innovative techniques of cybersketching, on which he wrote a book in 2009. He was also a Fellow of the RAS.

In 2007, Peter, his wife Tina and their young daughter Jacy moved to Cornwall, where he led an almost nocturnal life, observing or writing until first light in order to meet the demands of the huge workload he took on. The BAA is only one of several organisations that will find the gap he leaves very hard to fill.

Peter's contribution to amateur astronomy was marked in 2016, when a minor planet was named 95935 Grego in his honour.

Paul Stephens & Bill Leatherbarrow

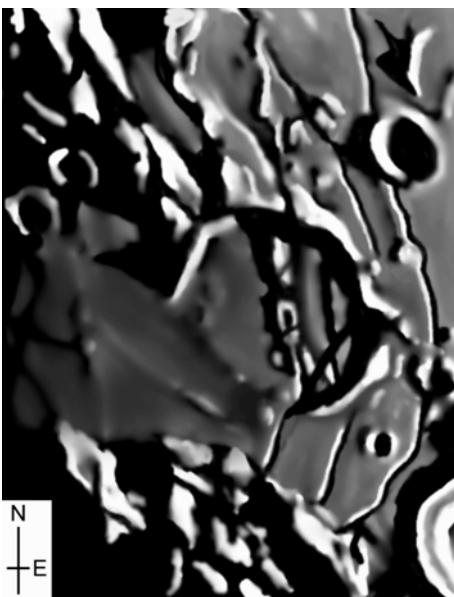
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The crater Hippalus on 2013 April 20, 22:00 to 23:00 UT. Good seeing, slight mist. 300mm Newtonian $\times 150$ –200. Observational drawing by Peter Grego using a PDA.