

ROBERT BARKER

Robert Barker died at St George's Hospital, Stamford, in 1966 September after a prolonged illness. Until his eighty-fourth year, he was one of the most familiar figures at the Association's meetings, and it was only a serious cycling accident then that curtailed his physical activities.

He was born in 1873, and in his younger days was an accomplished musician; he was trained as a chorister at All Saints' in London, and wrote a considerable amount of church music. For years he was music critic of the old *Morning Post* and the *Manchester Guardian*. He was also a first-class athlete, and at his peak was one of the fastest sprinters in England. His main sport was, however, cycling, and he held a number of records at the end of the last century. Until his accident he remained a keen cyclist; during the War, and afterwards, he often used to push-bicycle to Burlington House meetings from his home at Cheshunt.

Barker's chief astronomical interests were the Moon and Mars. He was one of the most active members of the Lunar Section before the last war, and many of his papers are to be found in our *Journal*, as well as in the *English Mechanic* and many other publications both British and foreign. Some of his opinions were hotly challenged; in particular he followed Lowell in believing that the Martian canals existed as hard, straight (though not necessarily artificial) markings. He also held that the lunar surface is not completely changeless, and he considered that the dark bands in Aristarchus and other craters had shown marked development during the past few decades. Views of this sort

are controversial, but Barker was never afraid of controversy; he put forward his ideas fearlessly, and was always prepared for criticism and comment.

One of his most obvious characteristics was his kindness to young would-be astronomers. I have personal knowledge of this. When I joined the Association in 1934, as a schoolboy of eleven, Barker went out of his way to encourage and assist me; he was always ready with advice and counsel, and I shall never forget the deep debt of gratitude that I owe him. I am only one of many whom he helped in similar fashion.

Barker's most active period as an astronomical observer takes one back some way into the past; his colleagues were men such as Goodacre, Ainslie, Franks, Maunder, Wilkins, Parr—all of whom are dead now, but are certainly not forgotten. Neither will Robert Barker be forgotten, either as a man or as an astronomer. His death will be regretted deeply by his many friends all over the world.

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