

Historical Section

Three Girton astronomers



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Girton College, located on Girton Road running north-west out of Cambridge, was founded in 1869 by Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon, as the first women's college in Cambridge University. Although they could attend lectures and sit exams, women were not allowed to receive Cambridge degrees until 1948. Other colleges for women followed (Newnham in 1871 and New Hall, now Murray Edwards, in 1954) and in 1976 Girton became co-educational, a trend followed by most of the Cambridge colleges.

It turns out that Girton College was the *alma mater* of three of the Association's early members – Annie Maunder, Alice Everett and Lilian Martin-Leake; three young women who studied together and went on to succeed in diverse fields. We present here pen portraits of their careers.

Annie Maunder

Annie Scott Dill Russell (1868–1947), later Annie Maunder, was one of our most accomplished and distinguished members. She was a founder member of the BAA and the second Editor of the *Journal*, a post she held from 1894–'96 and again from 1917–'30. Annie was born in Strabane, Northern Ireland. She matriculated to Girton in 1886 to study mathematics and achieved the rank of Senior Optime (second-class degree) in her final exams.

Annie was one of the first cohorts of women to be hired by the Royal Observatory, Greenwich (RGO). The women were hired as computers, reducing the observations made overnight by the observers, and were paid on the lowest civil service grade, regardless of qualifications. Annie excelled in the job, adding observational and photographic skills as part of the solar department.

Her boss was Edward Walter Maunder, one of the prime movers of the Association and the



Annie Maunder (1868–1947).

first Editor of its *Journal*. In 1888 Maunder's first wife died, leaving him to bring up five children. Maunder proposed to Annie, and she accepted – but this meant that she had to give up her professional post at Greenwich, which was only open to unmarried women. Nevertheless, she continued to do research as an unpaid assistant to her husband.

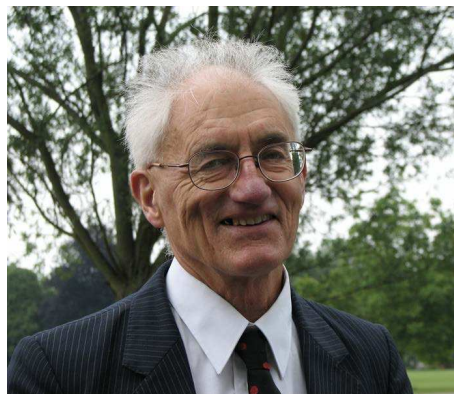
The Maunders attended five solar eclipses together, mostly as part of BAA expeditions. Annie's expertise in solar photography ▶

Prof Roger Griffin (1935–2021)

Roger Griffin is likely to go down in history as the last astronomer to make systematic professional observations from the telescopes in Cambridge. For over 50 years, he used a spectrograph attached to the observatory's 36-inch telescope to measure the orbital speeds of binary stars, producing a uniquely long series of consistent observations from which he could determine the periods, physical separations and masses of the stars.

Roger will also be remembered by many in the BAA as a good friend and mentor to amateur observers. In the early days of amateur spectroscopy, he was always willing to share his insights, and latterly he became an ardent campaigner against light pollution, having seen how the expansion of university buildings to the south of his observatory had impacted his own work.

As a student, I remember the warm welcome when I visited Roger late at night. He would allow me to drive the telescope to his next target and express delight when a binary system had nearly completed its first full orbit since the start of his observations. He would show me a graph of how his measurements were returning



Prof Roger Griffin. Richard Griffin

to the same velocity he had first measured decades previously. The only time when visitors were not welcome was at dusk on spring evenings, when Roger would be anxiously taking that season's final measurements of stars in the winter sky.

Roger arrived in Cambridge as an undergraduate in 1954 and went on to complete a PhD at the Cambridge Observatories. But the defining moment of his career came in 1967 with the publication of a now classic paper,¹ describing the spectrograph that he would go on to use for the rest of his life. The principle behind the instrument – correlating spectra against

a template recorded on photographic plate to determine their redshifts – is still widely used today, albeit in a digitised form.

From 1975, Roger began publishing his observations in the journal *The Observatory*, where they formed a continuous numbered series of papers, 'Spectroscopic binary orbits from photoelectric radial velocities'. Roger continued this series for the rest of his life; the last paper, number 265, appeared in 2019. This is surely the longest continuous series of papers in the astronomical literature, and it seems unlikely to be surpassed.

Roger was not a man to do anything by half measures. Outside astronomy, his great passion was running, and he was a formidable athlete. He ran the London Marathon eleven times, and in 2003, aged 68, ran the fastest time of anybody his age or older – 3h 30min.

It was dreadfully sad that Roger's final battle with Alzheimer's disease coincided with the lockdown of 2020. He passed away peacefully at his home on 2021 February 12, aged 85. 🕒

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References

¹ Griffin R. F., 'A photoelectric radial-velocity spectrometer', *ApJ*, **148**(465): ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1967ApJ...148..465G/abstract