



Obituary

Ronald James Livesey (1929–2021)

Ron Livesey CEng, FICE, FRAS, a former Director of the BAA Aurora & Noctilucent Cloud Section, passed away on 2021 January 25.

Ron was born in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, on 1929 February 11, the only child of James and Agnes Livesey. He was educated at Kilmarnock Academy and in 1946 became an apprentice civil engineer with Glenfield & Kennedy Ltd in the town. He then became a junior assistant with Baptie, Shaw & Morton, but in 1951 was called up for national service and served with the Royal Engineers in Austria. On his return he rejoined the company in Glasgow. In 1951, Ron qualified for a Final Course Certificate of the Royal Technical College of Glasgow and a Higher National Certificate, both in civil engineering. He retired from Baptie, Shaw & Morton in 1994.

Ron was a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) from 1956 and the Institution of Water Engineers from 1957, becoming a Fellow of the ICE in 1971 and a Fellow of the Institution of Water Engineers & Scientists in 1974. He was also awarded the Miller Prize and the ICE Local Associates Medal in 1956. Ron's engineering work took him all over the world, with projects including lighthouses in Sri Lanka and water treatment in Sudan and Nigeria. He also designed much of the Glen Turret Dam in Scotland, using a slide rule and sheets of paper. He said that he had occasional nightmares about the dam bursting, as his calculations were never independently checked.

His interest in astronomy was sparked in the 1930s by visits to his grandfather's house, where he found a book by Sir James Jeans called *The Mysterious Universe*. His earliest telescope mount, built in the garden, was made from discarded plastic bottles. Ron had a wide and diverse interest in the subject; astronomy suited his enquiring and analytical mind. He was a meticulous observer and recorder of astronomical objects, with particular interests in the Moon, Sun and the upper atmospheric phenomena of the aurorae and noctilucent clouds.

Ron joined the BAA on 1958 Nov 26. The precision in his observational work and analyses was recognised by the BAA Council when he was

invited to take the post of Director of the Aurora Section in 1982. His Section newsletters were meticulously prepared and sent out regularly by post to Section members. They were produced by hand, as he was wary of computers and preferred not to entrust his data and work to them.

Ron had a particular interest in magnetometry and how slight fluctuations in the Earth's magnetic field could be used to make early predictions of auroral activity. To that end, he devised the 'jam-jar' magnetometer, which was constructed of simple components but was able to detect small magnetic changes, giving him early warning of impending aurorae.

In 2005 the post of Director passed to Dave Gavine, with Ron and myself as Assistant Directors. Ron's many years of work with the Section were recognised in the awarding of the BAA's Lydia Brown Medal in 1995 and the Walter Goodacre Medal in 2012. He was presented with the Lorimer Medal of the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh (ASE) on 2019 Sep 14, in recognition of his services to amateur astronomy. A further accolade was the naming of asteroid 7170 (Livesey) in his honour by the IAU, at the request of its discoverer, Rob McNaught.

Ron married Janet Gollan Taylor ('Ena') in 1955 August, at the church in Kilmaurs. They had a family of one boy, Graham, and two girls, Alison and Wendy. Ron and Ena moved to Edinburgh in 1987 and this resulted in Ron joining the ASE and developing a long-time, close friendship with Dave Gavine. Ron and Dave spent many happy hours in Edinburgh coffee houses, discussing the state of the Sun and recent auroral or noctilucent cloud displays.

It was my personal pleasure and honour to have known Ron for many years. First invited to speak to the Dundee Astronomical Society (DAS) back in the 1970s, he made a huge impression on the members and was invited back to talk on many occasions, during which he became a close friend of the Society and many of its members personally. DAS and Ron had a mutual special



Ron Livesey at the BAA Exhibition Meeting in Edinburgh on 2017 Jun 24. K. Kennedy

interest in the aurora and this very strong bond was recognised by Ron being invited to become an honorary life member of DAS in 1980. Ron happily accepted and continued to give talks and assistance to DAS members for many years.

I benefitted greatly from my friendship with Ron as when I took on the role of Aurora Section Director, he freely gave me his support and much of his accumulated knowledge from his 23 years in this post.

Ron had many talents, not the least of which was a flair for art – in particular, landscape watercolour painting. Once again, Ron's engineering precision showed through, especially in his rendering of buildings which were all in perfect proportion. Rarely making a trip without his sketchbook and pencils, he would convert the sketches to paintings at leisure.

He was a gentle man of great knowledge and wisdom, of great precision and analytical power, and yet was modest about these outstanding qualities. I and many others in the astronomical community will sorely miss Ron's gentle guidance and quiet humour.

Ron is survived by his son Graham, daughter Alison and grandchildren Emma, James, Rory, Catherine, Sarah and David. I would like to thank Graham for additional information about his father's earlier life. 🇬🇧

Ken Kennedy

► Open clusters (Cont'd)



NGC 6633. Taken with an 8-inch Ritchey–Chrétien telescope, QSI 583 camera with Astrodon filters, and EQ6 mount. This is an RGB image comprising 5×2min subs of each colour. David Davies

A selection of summer open clusters

Object	Const.	RA (h m s)	Dec. (° ' ")	No. of stars (ly)	Distance (Myr)	Age
Melotte 111	Com	12 25 06.0	+26 06 00	>40	280	450
M29	Cyg	0 23 56.0	+38 31 24	>50	4,000	13
NGC 6791	Lyr	19 20 53.0	+37 46 18	>2,500	13,000	8,000
Harvard 20 / Collinder 408	Sag	19 53 06.0	+18 20 00	30	5,700	60
M6	Sco	17 40 20.0	-32 15 12	> 120	1,590	94
M7	Sco	17 53 51.0	-34 47 36	> 80	980	200
IC 4756	Ser	18 38 31.2	+05 29 24	> 80	1,300	800
NGC 6633	Oph	18 27 31.2	+06 34 12	> 38	1,000	660