

Danie Overbeek stands out for his contributions in this field; he has been unique in providing observations of variable stars to help schedule and correlate data for satellites such as the Hubble Space Telescope, the ORFEUS mission, the ASTRO-1 mission, the EUVE mission, the EUVE satellite, the HIPPARCOS satellite, the IUE satellite, and the ROSAT satellite. These are satellites of space agencies such as NASA in the United States, and ESA in Europe.

Besides his very impressive contribution to the study of variable stars, he is also an avid observer of the Sun, and has provided very valuable information to our Solar Division on solar flares. Unrelated to the AAVSO, he is a keen occultation observer, has built his own seismograph, and monitors seismic activity around the world.

Although I talk to him quite often on the phone, requesting up-to-date information on southern variables which he provides within minutes or hours, myself and other members of the AAVSO are very excited that Danie will be coming to our Houston meeting to receive his award in person.

I would say that some people with this kind of a contribution may be a bit egotistical; in my experience, however, Danie has been exactly the opposite. He is humble, down-to-earth, and one of the friendliest persons I have known. He has always been extremely enthusiastic in helping young people to get started in astronomy and variable star astronomy. I sincerely believe that he deserves a great deal of recognition, from both the professional and amateur community, for his vital contributions to astronomy."

WARNER HONOURED

Professor Brian Warner, past President of the ASSA and presently Head of the Astronomy Department at the University of Cape Town, has been elected an Associate of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Associateship of the Society is given for leadership of internationally prominent astronomical institutions. Only a small number of non-resident British citizens have been made Associates since the founding of the RAS in 1820. The first to receive this honour was Dr A D Thackeray, more recently Dr M W Feast, former Director of the SAAO, became an Associate.

WILLIAM PARKINSON HIRST 1903-10-21 : 1994-05-27

It is a privilege to be asked to pay a tribute to W. P. (Bill) Hirst. I only regret not having known him before 1969, when he joined the staff of the University of Cape Town Physics Department. I thus have to rely to some extent on the reminiscences of others, who knew him at earlier times.

To start with some of my own memories: I first got to know him as an indefatigable calculator - not surprising, as he spent some thirty years working on the orbits of artificial satellites, minor planets, comets and double stars. He was a great help to me in my early fumbling attempts at computer programming. There was only the danger that one might clash with him in demands on computer time - something to which Bill did not take kindly.

Later I appreciated the clarity of his lecturing when he lent me his lecture notes on spherical trigonometry (which I have successfully managed never to return). His insight into optics was apparent when he was the first to predict that little glassy beads would be found on the surface of the Moon, which was later confirmed by the lunar landers - he had arrived at this conclusion by comparing the reflectance of the moon at various phases.

I gradually came to appreciate the wealth of his knowledge - for example, he told me of the best way of cleaning the hands: dip them in molten paraffin wax and strip the wax from them when cold - the sort of thing that only expert chemists know.

Next I discovered he was an excellent musician, though his piano playing has been put an end to by arthritis. Only more recently has it been revealed to me that he was also a talented composer.

He was also a virtuoso motor-car driver. On one occasion I saw him thwarted at the southern entrance to the University where two roads converge at an acute angle by another motorist who failed to give way to him at the stop sign on one of them. Stepping on the gas with quite horrific effect, he pursued the other right around the upper circular road and, I believe, caught him. On another occasion, I have heard, he drove over Houw Hoek Pass on the wrong lane of the two-lane freeway. When this was pointed out to him by his nervous passengers he indignantly silenced them, and successfully completed his feat.

These are only a couple of facets of his many-sided personality. I am told that in his youth he was a long-

distance runner for Queen's College, Cambridge. Later he was an actor, involved with Cecilia Sonnenberg and Rene Ahrenson in the celebrated Maynardville productions; and gave many radio talks for the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

In his mountaineering activities I did not share, and perhaps fortunately so. The following account comes from his close friend Ian Heathfield Elliott, and his devoted wife Mai:

"On one occasion, while climbing the Camp's Bay face of Table Mountain, we had come out of a chimney and had to step over a gap. Bill took off his rope which he had coiled about him and suggested that we should tie up before proceeding, when all of a sudden there was a call from above and a member of the Mountain Club told us not to go any further - he was coming down to check the rope (Bill's remark was 'Bloody hell!') He came down, took the rope from Bill, gave it a good sharp pull, and the rope broke; whereupon he told Bill that he should have had more sense than to have attempted to climb with that rope. Bill responded that he had climbed the Austrian Alps with that rope. The man then threw the rope down the side of the mountain, and told Bill that that was the last of his Alpine rope. He then tied us together, using a nylon rope. Bill kept on muttering about his rope until we got to the top of the mountain. The gentleman, who was a well-known member of the club, turned to Bill and said 'Well, you can get down on your knees now and thank God that I saw your rope, which was no better than a piece of string'. Bill was not satisfied with this, and told him that he was going to report him to the Mountain Club - which caused much amusement as the gentleman happened to be the Chairman of the club."

Much later, in fact in 1986, when Bill was 82, there was an even more dramatic scene, which earned him a picture on the front page of the Cape Times. Leading a party up Table Mountain, he suffered what appears to have been an angina attack, and had to be lifted off a ledge by helicopter - an experience which left him nothing the worse for wear!

Bill was Chief Chemist of the Shell Company's establishment in Woodstock from about 1938. His colleague, Harold Krumm (whom Bill always persisted in calling Horace) relates the following:

"Shell world-wide was divided into several areas, southern Africa being known as Area D. One day the Managing Director of Area D, based in London, phoned the laboratory from Head Office in Cape Town to say

that he was coming to the lab, and wanted to be shown around. When Bill heard about this he said "Why doesn't the man phone me directly?" The Managing Director arrived, and Bill stayed in his office, having instructed a more junior member of his staff to show the visitor around, without ever emerging. The Managing Director returned to Cape Town, then to London, and said he had never been treated so badly - where the Chief Chemist sat at his desk, pipe in mouth, and with a week's growth on his face!

"Bill used to run a Packard motor car and Shell used to get in a variety of petrols, including the petrol used in Spitfire aircraft. In order to get the correct octane level for the aircraft, lead was added to the fuel to achieve an octane rating of about 120. Bill had first choice of petrol for his car, and would use the heavily leaded Spitfire 120 octane for his Packard.

"One day his car was sent to be de-carbonised, and that morning the laboratory received a call from the garage: 'We don't know what is happening here, but the insides of the cylinders are coated with a thick deposit of a white substance' - which was, of course, the oxide of lead left by the high-octane fuel. Bill was out at the time the call came, and the person who took it said 'Just scrape it off, and get on with it' - exactly what he knew Bill would have told them to do."

For many years, Bill had worked on astronomical observations of double stars and occultations, and for this work and that on the tacking of artificial satellites he became the second to receive the Gill medal of the Astronomical Society of South Africa, as well as the Citation of the Smithsonian Institute of Harvard, whither he went after his retirement from Shell.

His protracted and assiduous study of the heavens led to the discovery of several minor planets. He used his skill as a computer - before the days of the electronic computer - to compute the orbits of unidentified minor plants that had been found at the then Union Observatory. His first, being given the prerogative of naming, he called after his daughter, Vivienne, only to learn that it had been spotted by some earlier observer. The second he relinquished to a co-discoverer in the United States. But the third he was finally allowed to call Vivienne without demur.

More was to follow: in 1987, at the suggestion of Rupert Hurly, Brian Marsden of the Smithsonian Institute, propose that yet another asteroid be called Hirst, in view of Bill's service to astronomy; and thus he finally takes his place in the sky.