

National radio too, carried news of the event, when the "Spektrum" radio program, broadcast on RSG on 31 July, covered the event. This led to a bit of confusion, however and several queries were received asking for details on where to see the exploding galaxy reported on the news.

The results of the latest observations are being analyzed and should be published shortly. The preliminary hypothesis is that the over-thousandfold increase in gamma ray energy observed from PKS 2155-304 suggests that its central black hole has devoured several solar masses of matter. ☆

obituary

Rupert Frederick Hurly

21 December 1922 to 15 April 2006

Rupert Hurly was born in Sea Point and educated at Loreto Convent and St Joseph's College (Marist Brothers) in Rondebosch. He matriculated with a first class pass at age 15 and went to the University of Cape Town where he was the youngest ever graduate for the land surveying degree at the age of 19. He joined the Cape Field Artillery and was sent to Egypt and later to Italy. On his release in 1946 he was employed by the Victoria Falls and Transvaal Power Company (a predecessor of Eskom) and surveyed powerlines throughout the Transvaal.



He married Kathleen Dowsley on 8 February 1947 and in March 1948 they returned to Cape Town where he joined the long established firm of Bisset & Brooke. He was still practising under the name of Bisset & Hurly at the time of his death. They then lived in Claremont and joined St Ignatius Parish where he continued to attend Mass until his final illness.

Rupert became seriously involved in astronomy at the time of the first artificial satellites in 1957, but he was certainly interested long before that as he several times referred to having observed his first Solar Eclipse in 1940. He joined the Cape Town Moonwatch team from inception where his mathematical expertise and training as a land surveyor stood him in good stead. He took over as leader of the team when Mr W.H. (Bill) Hirst de-

parted for America to do a similar job on a world wide scale.

Soon Rupert was giving talks on space to any organisation which wanted them and he became well known at the US Information Service in Cape Town who supplied publicity films on loan to illustrate such talks. Before long USIS would not lend any of their films to anyone else (including the writer) unless that person had Rupert's written permission. For many years he wrote a monthly astronomy and space column for the *Cape Argus* and was also responsible for the words in an illustrated space feature not unlike a cartoon strip except that it was designed to help its readers understand the then new science of space exploration.

Shortly after the observatory at Sutherland was opened in 1973, Rupert paid a visit and arranged to talk to the public at the local school. As usual, he had one of the American space films with him but he had it shown with the soundtrack turned off and proceeded to recite the entire commentary from memory – in Afrikaans! He said afterwards that his greatest problem was technical terms for which there was then no equivalent in Afrikaans so he just made them up as he went along.

For nearly forty years, he led the teams which conducted visitors around the Royal Observatory at the Cape of Good Hope, now the South African Astronomical Observatory and innumerable people

got their first telescopic view of planets and star clusters etc from him. One evening when there was little to look at, he was just pushing the telescope around the sky when he chanced on a large bright cluster. We made a note of its position not far from the foot of the False Cross and used it whenever there were no planets or the Moon to show. Soon the voluntary guides were all referring to the object as Rupert's Cluster and it was over 20 years before anyone thought of checking its real designation. It turned out to be NGC 2516, but to the writer it will always remain "Rupert's Cluster."

He joined both ASSA and its Cape Centre and quickly became active in both. He was Chairman of the Centre for two years 1970 - 1972 and was President of the Society in 1978 -1979. Rupert was a member of the Society's Editorial Board from 1972 to 1975 and then took on the job of editing the annual *Handbook* from 1976 until 1989 – a total of 14 issues. He received the Society's Long Service Award in 1988 and was elected an Honorary member in 1999.

Rupert's political interests seem to have developed from around 1955 when he joined the Claremont and Wynberg Rate-payers Association committee. Rupert and Kay both joined the Progressive Party when it formed in 1959 and Rupert was the first candidate to stand for the party in a Provincial Council by-election, in Green Point in 1960. In those early days he stood many times and was even-

tually returned to the Provincial Council as MPC for Rondebosch in 1977, holding the seat until the Council was disbanded in 1985. He was also a Cape Town City Councillor for Rondebosch from 1978 until January 1995 having previously been chairman of Rondebosch Ratepayers Association for 8 years.

With all his astronomy work plus his political activities outlined above, it is clear that Rupert was a very busy man and had to organise his time carefully. However this is only part of the story. Some of his other activities are simply listed below:

- Served on the council and as President of the Institute of Land Surveyors
- External examiner of Land Surveying at the University of Cape Town
- Trustee of Cape Field Artillery since 1968
- Member of Gunners Association and more recently the Moths
- Member of Catholic Men's Society and served on Parish Council at St Ignatius for many years
- Read at Mass, took up the collection and was a keen member of the Catholic Lunch Club
- Served on board of Catholic weekly newspaper *Southern Cross* for 21 years
- Board of Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, 1988 - 1995, Chairman 1990
- Board of St Josephs Home for Chronic Invalid Children for 12 years
- Board of Holy Cross Children's Home

in Parow for 18 years

- Board of South African Museum and the South African Library
- Member of Table Mountain Preservation Board
- Board of Western Province Blood Transfusion Service for 6 years and made 154 blood donations

As if this were not enough, Rupert had a strong interest in all things historical. He researched his own family, land surveyors, astronomers, the Cape and South Africa. He tried hard to have the Strand Concourse in Cape Town named as the Place de la Caille, but losing one battle didn't daunt him. He succeeded with the rebuilding of Maclear's Beacon on Table Mountain and with the preservation in the Golden Acre of a cannon used by Maclear to mark one end of a baseline on the Grand Parade. The positions of three of the train stations on the now extinct Sea Point branch line are marked due to his efforts. The history of the Sea Point Observatory is known due to the work of Rupert and Prof Brian Warner of UCT (1976 *MNASSA*, 35 (5&6), 57).

Rupert leaves behind his wife Kay, children Barbara, Patrick, Margaret and Anne and grandchildren Timothy, Alexandra, Matthew and Luke. We offer them all our sincerest sympathy.

Goodbye my friend, I shall think of you every time I look at your cluster.

Cliff Turk

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