

Preface

In January 1968, only a few days after my tenth birthday, I picked up a pocket-sized book entitled *The Observer's Book of Astronomy* by Patrick Moore. Looking back, it is no exaggeration to say that this little book changed my whole life. I instantly became obsessed with astronomy, with watching the book's author on TV and with buying his other books. Just 11 months later, due to NASA's Apollo 8 mission, Patrick started becoming one of the most famous people on UK Television. Seven months after that he was on BBC screens every night when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon. If I had not already been hooked by his books, I was certainly hooked on the man by then. The late 1960s seemed to be an era when every young British boy's favourite TV hero was named Patrick! Patrick Troughton was *Dr Who*, Patrick Macnee was John Steed of *The Avengers*, Patrick McGeehan was John Drake in *Danger Man*, and Patrick Moore was Mr Astronomy and Space on the BBC.

What was the astronomer Patrick's real attraction? Well, he was one of the few adults that a young boy like me could identify with: he had a child's unbounded enthusiasm for space, planets, aliens and rockets all wrapped up in a man's (very large) body. To my young mind this seemed like the way to go. Patrick appeared to be a giant-sized schoolboy with none of the millstones that normal adults have. He was his own boss, with no wife and screaming kids, and so was free to totally immerse his life in a fascinating hobby: that was the sort of life I wanted! As a 10 year old boy I looked around at other men of Patrick's age, married men, and they all seemed to be buried under a veritable infinity of commitments and hassles. In many cases they seemed to always have a sort of simmering irritation with their nagging other half, or with the dreaded mother-in-law, the butt of most 1960s jokes! All other adult males seemed to have lost the excitement and sense of wonder they had enjoyed as children. But there was Patrick, with big telescopes in his garden and permanent enthusiasm about what he was going to point them towards that night. Somehow, he had not gone astray and he had kept his childhood dreams alive. He carried no emotional baggage. What a great life!

Of course, as a ten year old boy in the male dominated 1960s, blissfully removed from adulthood, you don't always interpret the world of grown-ups correctly, but after the Apollo 11 Moon landing I became hooked on astronomy and space. I noticed that Patrick, like me, was an only child. I also found out, some years later, that Patrick had joined the British Astronomical Association (BAA), aged 11; so had I. At the age of 25 I was invited to become a post holder in the BAA Lunar Section (the photographic co-ordinator); so was Patrick, 35 years earlier, when he was made the BAA Lunar Section secretary, also at the age of 25! Patrick was a BAA President and a BAA Goodacre medallist: so, many years later, was I. As the years went by there seemed to be more and more strange parallels which I couldn't seem to ignore. For example, our mothers had the same birthday, June 27th, and our fathers had a distinguished military background. Patrick had a bad left knee from a wartime accident, sustained when he was 21. I permanently damaged my left knee in a cycling accident at the same age. He had one very good eye and one weak eye: Snap! Patrick claimed that he first came to prominence in the BAA after making some observations of the lunar 'sea' known as the Mare Crisium, in the late 1930s. Again, ditto, except it was 1981 in my case, when my photograph of that feature won the BAA Lunar Section's photographic competition. We were even the same height, although definitely NOT the same weight!

Now, I am not a religious or superstitious person, but these similarities kept my interest in Patrick going, and, throughout my adult years, I became more and more interested in everything he did, as well as buying all (well, almost all!) his astronomy books. I started to wonder if the same part of life's 'quantum matrix' (my term – and no, I can't explain it) had been used to program his and my DNA! This ridiculous belief was only strengthened when I realised that, back in 1968, my parents and I had chosen a house in Suffolk in the same week that Patrick and his mother had chosen their thatched cottage, *Farthings*, in Selsey, just a stroll from a friend of Patrick's who lived in a big property called *The Old Mill House*. Less than 100 yards from our Suffolk home, where I am typing these words, there is another cottage called *Farthings* and, a few yards away, another property called *The Old Mill House*. Bizarre coincidences no doubt, but just a little bit spooky too!

Anyway, needless to say, from my childhood years onward I had started compiling a scrap book about Patrick, which just got bigger and bigger. Every book or article that Patrick wrote, I tried to get hold of... etcetera, etcetera. In many ways this book is the end result of that scrapbook.

I first met Patrick 'in the flesh' on September 26, 1970, at a BAA Lunar Section meeting in London. I was 12 and he was 47. Apart from a cheery "Hello there" from Patrick (which put me on cloud nine) we did not converse; but I was in awe, even though he wasn't an official speaker on that day. His Churchillian physical presence was one thing, but his crystal clear voice was like a mobile public address system! Patrick never used a microphone and just laughed if one was offered; he was clearer without one than everyone else was using one. He was a powerhouse of activity at all BAA meetings in that era. Everyone else seemed half asleep compared to his enthusiasm and energy levels. Other speakers mumbled and got confused and

droned on and on for ages. He always excited and inspired the audience. He delivered the goods; he was wired up; he was plugged in; he was smoking!

If there was any sign of audience scepticism or negativity during those 1970s era meetings, or any hitch with the slide projector, Patrick would adopt his bulldog expression, pull an extraordinary grimace and immediately thump both his massive fists so firmly onto his hips (actually, rather higher up than his hips) that it must surely have hurt. This extreme hands-on-hips 'stance of defiance' seemed to stay with Patrick his whole life and seemed to make him look even bigger than he already was. Another of Patrick's characteristics, signifying total enthusiasm and 100 % commitment to the BAA, was the very manner he would leave his seat on the front row of the audience to take his place on the stage, prior to delivering a talk. He might seem bored when sitting waiting for his turn, but when called by the President (or Chairman) he would literally explode from his seat and propel, at great speed, his enormous bulk forward, heading, as a crow flies, directly for the stage. His stance would be one of a charging rhinoceros, with his head down, and his facial expression grim and fixed rigid, as if he was about to embark in a fight to the death! Then, as soon as he arrived on the stage, the audience, perhaps shocked by his deadly serious expression, would soon be laughing as he cracked an opening joke, such as "Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, after the Lord Mayor's show comes the dustcart!" He would then promptly deliver a self-deprecating talk about a field of astronomy in which he would modestly claim his contribution was insignificant. He always spoke very fluently and very clearly, and he never, ever, used written notes. The performance was always loud, perfect and enthusiastic, without any hesitation whatsoever; it was also, invariably, hilarious! A short while ago someone asked me if I could think of a modern character whose manner most resembled the Patrick Moore, in his prime, that I remembered from the astronomy meetings during my teenage years. Well, no-one quite fits the bill, but I'd say the modern character who comes closest in general demeanour and humour to the 1970s Patrick Moore is the London Mayor Boris Johnson; except Patrick, in his prime, was louder, larger and spoke a lot faster.

Patrick would always wear a blue blazer, with a shirt and tie; sometimes an RAF tie and sometimes a BAA tie. Admittedly he owned more than one blazer by his later years and even a sports jacket in his younger years. One vivid turquoise blazer that Patrick owned he claimed he had purchased when abroad in a gloomy shop, thinking it was "Oxford Blue"! You would never, *ever*, see Patrick wearing a coat, or a jumper, or a hat. It was always just a blue blazer, a shirt and a tie, at every UK venue. On one very rainy day, at a BAA London meeting, I remember someone asking Patrick if he had brought an umbrella along? 'Heaven forfend!' he cried, eyebrow raised, 'I'd lose it in minutes!' Even in the depths of winter and outdoors he would be dressed in a blazer, shirt and tie. In hot countries, and in his later years indoors, he took to wearing huge colourful short-sleeved shirts and tent-like smocks, but I do not think in his adult years he ever owned a coat or wore a pullover, even though his mother once insisted he took a woolly jumper to Siberia. It was extremely rare to see Patrick carrying any form of case either. He never referred to written notes and he had no interest in bureaucratic paperwork; so a case was superfluous.

His huge blazer was his filing cabinet and contained plenty of spiral bound notepads, pencils, rubbers, illuminated pens, his pipe, and blank card templates for rough sketching Mars, Jupiter or Saturn onto, whenever he was near a telescope. The only time you ever saw him with a case was if he had a huge number of photographic slides to project. Then he would bring a blue and battered suitcase along, so bulky he could not possibly lose it. Inside the case it would be 99 % empty, except for a few boxes of slides. I saw him with that same case, on rare occasions, throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and I have been told that he owned it way back into the 1950s too!

I wrote to Patrick shortly after I first met him at that September 1970 meeting, trying to get him to visit the school astronomy club which I had founded. He never actually made it (he said his housekeeper, Mrs Denny, had just died) but I was amazed that someone that famous would even write back to a 12 year old child – instantly! In later years I learned that Patrick always answered every letter he received, within days, and during the 1970s and 1980s they piled in at more than 100 every week! To cope with this volume he used blank postcards inserted into his 1908 Woodstock typewriter and he answered most queries with just a few lines, typed in seconds. All postage costs (for thousands of replies each year) were funded by him and not by the BBC. He was simply not interested in bureaucratic hassles and claim forms, just in providing the perfect answer, quickly and concisely. Amazing!

I used to bump into Patrick at BAA meetings throughout the 1970s and he always had a kind word for me. Then, in the 1980s, I started serious astronomical observing and got to know him much better. We served on the BAA Lunar Section Committee and the BAA Council together and, from 1982 onwards, he was keen to show my photographs on *The Sky at Night*. From the early 1990s he started asking me to supply photographs for his books and programmes on a regular basis and even to write occasional technical chapters for him. Then he asked me to write an entire book in his Springer ‘Practical Astronomy Series’ followed by a second book after that! When I followed in his footsteps and became the BAA President, he invited me onto *The Sky at Night*; I could scarcely believe it! I was the sole guest on the programme three times during 1998–1999 and an occasional guest on numerous episodes after that. It seemed like destiny and I was proud that, like him, I had kept my childhood dreams alive.

As my scrapbooks on Patrick became bigger, I started collecting more and more little-known information about him, as well as compiling a complete list of his books. In 2002, I started writing it all up into a draft biography. Then, in 2003, Patrick suddenly published his own autobiography entitled *80 Not Out*. Rarely have I ever been so curious about any publication, even though I felt I knew almost as much about Patrick as he did himself and even though his book might make mine obsolete. As it turned out, I needn’t have worried. Yes, it was an entertaining read, but to me huge chunks were mysteriously missing or plain untrue! The book did not really give the reader any idea of how much amateur astronomy had governed Patrick’s life. The BAA, which totally dominated and shaped Patrick’s world from the age of 11, barely got a mention and neither did things that had gone wrong in his

life. The book was mainly about his TV career, his political views, trips abroad, bureaucracy, and the famous people he had met; but there was little about his obsession with observing the Moon, his flawed belief that its craters had a volcanic origin, 'Transient Lunar Phenomena', or his BAA politics. Neither was there anything about the numerous foes he had branded as 'serpents'! I decided to put this right and, as planned, cover these aspects of his life in a much more accurate book. Even in 2003, I judged my own manuscript on Patrick to be far superior to his autobiography. There are obviously overlaps with his *80 Not Out*, but I would venture to suggest that my book is far more comprehensive on the events that will be of most interest to the amateur astronomer reading this book. My alternative biography is not about *The Sky at Night*, it is about Patrick, the British amateur astronomer, warts and all. I have said relatively little about Patrick's cricket, 'amateur dramatic' and musical accomplishments as it is really just the astronomical/back-garden observer side of his life that interests me. Also, there simply is not space to write any more about him – he just did too much in his life!

Patrick had his good and bad points, leading some to class him as a confusing enigma. One lifelong acquaintance said that he seemed to verge on the inscrutable at all times! He was a man of his word, totally loyal to his real friends, a truly tireless observer at the telescope and a tireless charity worker too. He must have raised millions for UK charities associated with Cancer Research, Cystic Fibrosis and a host of other worthy causes, often by simply giving public talks and donating the thousands of pounds worth of ticket money. The money never entered his bank account; he just told them to write a cheque to the charity in question. Whenever he gave such talks, for charities, or for local astronomical societies, up and down the country, he waived any fee and did not even claim travel expenses or overnight accommodation costs. Staggering! Perhaps even more amazing was that when he was driving hundreds of miles around the country in his beaten up wrecks of cars, to give a free lecture, and the best lecture anyone would ever hear, he would happily pick up bedraggled strangers, hitching a lift when their car had broken down. Their jaws would drop to the floor when they saw who was offering them a free taxi service.

Barely a month went by without Patrick being involved in a local charity event with either *The Lord's Taverners* or Sussex Country Cricket club in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I should add that the BAA itself is a registered charity, devoted to providing assistance to amateur astronomers for no financial gain. Undoubtedly the time Patrick donated to the BAA over the years, as a section director, meetings recorder, President and speaker, was equivalent to many man-years of any normal person's effort. Yet it was all given totally free, and from a man who was a household name for more than half a century.

Beyond this, his personal generosity to children, sick or healthy, was astounding. If he was at an astronomy meeting with a bookstall and he saw a young child looking at one of his books he would buy it for them, with no hesitation! If a parent wrote to Patrick saying their child was seriously unwell but was interested in astronomy, Patrick would not only write to the child, he would send them a load of books or, on several occasions, buy them a telescope and deliver it in person to the

hospital, without a moment's delay! On one occasion, when a child's parents brought their excited astronomy-mad youngster to Patrick's door, but found that he'd had to dash out to a TV commitment, Patrick placed adverts in national newspapers to trace the parents and re-arrange the visit! As well as his generosity to those who were seriously ill, and to children, he was incredibly generous to his friends. Many future astronomers and scientists, such as Peter Cattermole, Iain Nicolson, John Mason, and many others, asked for a look through Patrick's telescopes one day, as young men, and were astounded to find they were welcome at any time, on any day or night (by Patrick and his mother). Like Dr Who's assistants they suddenly found they had entered a magical world in a different continuum, where their own personal Time Lord could show them the wonders of the Universe, and they could spend a day with a TV star, for free! Patrick's homes, in East Grinstead, Armagh and Selsey, were like a Victorian oasis of fun and sanity, well away from the angry and competitive outside world. Also, the number of rounds of drinks Patrick purchased in his lifetime must have run into countless thousands. It was impossible to be in Patrick's house for more than 30 seconds before he offered you a drink, or a meal, or your own big bedroom for the night, if it was getting late. Everyone who left his house seemed to leave with a book or something of value. Complete strangers, with their Space-mad kids, would nervously knock on his door while passing through Selsey, and be welcomed in, fed and watered and shown the telescopes! They would be treated to a memorable day that they and their children would never forget. Loyalty to what he saw as his true friends, fans and admirers was at the very top of Patrick's list.

At complete odds to this, if you were a friend, but criticised Patrick, even slightly (especially behind his back), you made an enemy for life. For his loyalty and immense generosity he expected unswerving loyalty in return, like a mediaeval baron. True friends did not ever criticise or envy one another; that was a code he lived by. Also, if a true friend was ever asked to review one of his books, the review would have to be glowing: what other kind of book review could any decent person possibly give to a dear friend? Patrick also had a frustrating habit of exaggerating countless stories about his early life. His RAF career, his alleged lunar discoveries and the people he had met; all these tales got a bit more colourful as the years ticked by. The most popular stories got more and more out of control until, in some cases, he simply blatantly lied because, being so famous and so well-loved, he could get away with it and infuriate his opponents. There was certainly a dark side to the Moore, if not a dark side of the Moon! Perhaps I should qualify this by explaining that the lunar dark side is constantly changing as the Moon orbits the Sun; there is no permanent dark side. Apologies to Pink Floyd!

Patrick was, quite simply, a phenomenal public speaker and an unbelievably prolific author: on one occasion he wrote a major book entitled *The Unfolding Universe* in 10 days! Surely he must have been one of the most prolific popularisers of science of all time. Realistically, only Isaac Asimov can be compared to him in this context. For more than half a century Patrick churned out a new book every few months or even weeks! Also, unlike almost every other so-called TV astronomy expert, Patrick was a real amateur scientist and observer and kept his feet firmly on

the ground. If he was at home and the sky was clear, his eye would be at the telescope eyepiece and he would be making a sketch or an observation to send to the BAA. He was one of the most prolific British visual observers of all time. In terms of the number of observations of different categories of object, he may well have been unique. One only has to leaf through his personal observing logbooks to verify his awesome output and his sheer enthusiasm for looking through his telescopes and drawing what he saw. This lasted from childhood into his late seventies and only waned due to immobility and poor health. Thus he was an astronomer's astronomer, not just a 'TV personality' with a pushy agent, craving fame for fame's sake. On the negative side, he could be a spoilt, sulking, overgrown schoolboy, a woman hater, a modern teacher hater (and don't ask about women teachers), totally opinionated and an out-and-out racist on some occasions. With a distinctly Victorian style of upbringing, including parents who had lived in the British Colony and Protectorate of Kenya prior to his birth, many of Patrick's negative traits could never be reversed. But one thing is for sure: he was a one-off and refreshingly different. While his name was not unique, there will never be another Patrick Moore quite like him. Boring he was not!

Without a doubt there are people who saw Patrick more frequently than I: his close friends in Selsey, BBC producers, his many godsons and, in later life, his carers. However, I very much doubt whether any of them would have the mental stamina to write a biography of this size about Patrick. I also doubt whether any of them understood him better than I did. As a spoilt, single, only-child and life-long bachelor myself, who also joined the BAA aged 11, and have been obsessed by amateur astronomy ever since, I feel I have a better basis than most to write about the great man. I hope this book gives a more complete view of 'Patrick the Amateur Astronomer' and fills in some of the huge voids he deliberately created in his autobiography.

To create this work, I have spoken to scores of people, trawled through hundreds of BAA journals and meeting reports, hundreds of BAA Lunar Section circulars, over 200 of Patrick's own books and hundreds of hours of archival videotape footage (some acquired at great personal expense). In addition I have trawled through 40 years worth of personal letters from Patrick to myself, as well as half a century of newspaper cuttings, and 70 years worth of his observing logbooks, stored in his home, which he was always happy for me to read and photograph. I have also distilled my own personal memories of many conversations with the great man, on the telephone, at astronomy meetings, and at his Selsey home. I hope it has all been worth it! For me, every visit to Patrick's beloved 'Farthings' was like a pilgrimage to a holy shrine. His inspiration shaped my life and now I am writing about the man himself. He was, surely, the last of the great English visual 'gentlemen astronomers'; observing like a wealthy Victorian amateur, with Victorian standards, but living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. No cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening or DIY chores for him. His Mum, housekeepers, friends and, in the final years, various carers and neighbours, did those tedious, enthusiasm-sapping things!

In addition, as Patrick was, surely, the greatest astronomy populariser of all time, who would begrudge the man a few negative eccentricities? Not me. I loved his

good points and I loved his bad points just as much! Patrick survived for over half a century in the fickle TV business because he had no interest in money or material possessions and because people simply liked him and respected his principles, even if they didn't always agree with him. Although he was undoubtedly sexist by today's standards, women liked him too. They realised that, deep down, he was a harmless pussycat who had boundless mental energy, but would never hurt a fly. Patrick rarely took himself too seriously either, which was another endearing feature. The bottom line is, he was refreshingly different, not just a photocopied, politically correct, brainless clone, like so many vacuous celebrities these days. He was, I repeat, unique, and surely that is a good enough reason to write an honest biography about him. *Outer Space* is mind-bogglingly huge and we were incredibly lucky in having such a huge personality to explain it all to us, in plain English, and with a sense of humour.

With Patrick now departed, I can only say that our Universe, to me at least, seems a much poorer place. I hope this work allows his many fans to relive the excitement they felt whenever he appeared on TV, once a month, after the opening bars of Sibelius' *At the Castle Gate* had faded out...

To his many fans this was Patrick's Universe and we just lived in it. Now we have to somehow re-adjust. It won't be easy.

Cockfield, UK

Martin Mobberley

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It Came From Outer Space Wearing an RAF Blazer!

A Fan's Biography of Sir Patrick Moore

Mobberley, M.

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