

Naming Pluto

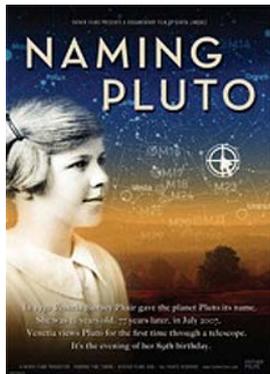
Producer/Director: Ginita Jimenez

DVD, Father Films, £9.99. (www.fatherfilms.com)

This DVD explores the chain of events surrounding the naming of the planet Pluto. In March 1930, eleven year old Venetia Burney was present when her father Charles Burney, Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford, and grandfather Falconer Madan, formerly Librarian of the Bodleian Library, were discussing the report in the *Times* of the discovery of a new planet by Clyde Tombaugh. Venetia suggested calling it 'Pluto'. Through her grandfather's contacts a telegram was sent to Lowell Observatory and Pluto was named. Incidentally, Falconer's brother

Henry Madan had, in 1878, suggested the names Phobos and Deimos for the moons of Mars.

Dr Allan Chapman from Oxford University gives a brief history of the discovery of



Pluto while Robert Massey of the RAS and our own Pete Lawrence also provide contributions to the story. Patrick Moore was seven when Pluto was discovered. He last saw Venetia 25 years ago and knowing she had never observed the planet, he invited her to his home, but unfortunately bad weather prevented them from seeing it. They had better luck at Herstmonceux where on the eve of her 89th birthday Venetia finally saw the very small image of the planet she had named.

During her visit to a local school, the children were amazed that Venetia's suggestion of a name for the planet had been chosen and impressed her with their own suggestions of names for a new planet.

This delightful short film by Ginita Jimenez is well produced and tells a human story with historical accuracy. The recent demotion of Pluto from planet status takes nothing away from this heartwarming story. Sadly, Venetia Burney Phair died aged 90 on 2009 April 30. This is a fitting memorial to someone whose small contribution to astronomy might easily be forgotten.

Ann Davies