

Obituaries

Doug Saw (1923–90)

On 1990 March 6, the Association lost one of its leading and best loved members.

Douglas Reginald Bassett Saw was born in High Wycombe on 1923 December 1. He was educated at Wycombe Grammar School and at Selwyn College, Cambridge, where he read chemistry. His entire professional career was as a research chemist with the Ministry of Defence. During World War Two he worked at Harwell, and subsequently he spent 34 years in the weapons research establishment at Westcott. Following his marriage in 1948 he moved to Aylesbury, but returned to Haddenham in 1981 after his early retirement on the grounds of poor health.

Doug Saw joined the BAA on 1961 February 22 and enrolled in the Variable Star Section, where he quickly became one of its most active and reliable observers. Cataclysmic variables particularly captured his interest and on 1967 October 26 he was the second discoverer of the outburst of the recurrent nova RS Ophiuchi, one hour after its first detection by M. Beyer in Germany. By 1979 he had made well over 10 000 observations of variable stars, and it was for this work that he became the first recipient

of the Association's Steavenson Memorial Award. He also became interested in the analysis of observations, and his ten-foot-long light curve of the slow nova HR Delphini 1967 was a highlight of the 1968 Exhibition Meeting.

Following the retirement of G. E. Patston in 1973, Doug became Secretary of the Variable Star Section. In this position he was responsible for the checking,

tabulation and plotting of many thousands of observations. This was an essential preliminary to analysis that also provided important feedback to observers through the Section's Circulars. He served on Council several times as an ordinary member, and was invited to become Director of the Variable Star Section in 1980. His modesty led him to
(continued on page 172)



The New Aces jazz band in a photograph of about 1960. Doug Saw is at the piano.

(Doug Saw – continued from page 165)

accept only on the condition that he should be called Acting Director. His work showed that he was fully capable of the duties of the post, however, and the Council decided to appoint him full Director against his expressed wishes: probably a unique occurrence in the Association's history!

Ill health forced him to resign the Directorship in 1987, but his enthusiasm was unabated and he was too valuable a member of the team to lose, so he became Deputy Director. The Director lived abroad, so much of the correspondence with members still came to Doug. Despite decreasing mobility – he was now spending most of the time plugged in to an oxygen machine – he continued

working on the Section records until a few weeks before his death. The reports that were written or co-authored by him, or compiled under his direction, discussed well over a quarter of a million observations. His letters to BAA members and friends were full of humour; he would often sign himself 'Dug' or use anagrams of his own name and that of his correspondent. He did not enjoy speaking in public, but accepted many invitations to talk on variable stars to local astronomical societies.

He was a founder member of Aylesbury Astronomical Society and helped to establish its Colin Hunt Observatory at Winchendon. He spent many hours on the construction of the dome and donated much equipment himself. He built his own observatory in his garden

at Aylesbury, and when this was damaged in a storm the telescope optics were taken by his son Adrian to the Blue Mountains in Australia, where they are still in use under clearer skies.

Doug had many interests besides astronomy. He was an accomplished jazz pianist, and formed his own band, the New Aces; and he was musical arranger for Cuddington Amateur Theatrical Society. He was also a railway enthusiast and it was in accordance with his wishes that his ashes were scattered on the old railway line at Wood Siding near Brill. Doug is survived by his wife Phyllis, two sons, Adrian and Kevin, a daughter, Cheryl, and seven grandsons. He will be sorely missed.

John Isles