

January 2002



ANDREW TRIMBLE (1907 - 2002)

It is with deep regret that we record the sad passing of the Society's only Honorary Life Member, Mr Andrew Trimble, who died on January 31st 2002, a few weeks short of his 95th birthday, after a short illness.

Andrew Trimble was the eldest son in a family of eight children of the late Mr Hamilton Trimble, and was born at Gortavale near Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland. When Andrew was five, the family moved to Corkhill, near Dungannon, Co. Tyrone.

In his teens he joined the Ulster Special Constabulary and when nineteen joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the earliest age for joining. He achieved top marks in the Police Education Exam, while at Police Headquarters in Belfast, gaining the highest marks ever awarded in that exam. In 1929 he assisted in the formation of the RUC Traffic Branch, after which he moved to the clerical section. He was promoted to sergeant and moved to Bessbrook, and subsequently to Newtownhamilton, Poyntzpass, Lurgan and Donaghadee. Andrew was also an expert rifle shot, being a former winner of the Ulster Championship Medal.

In 1928 he was a member of the guard of honour for Lord Craigavon at the opening of

Ballymena Town Hall, and again for the funeral procession of Lord Carson in Belfast. In 1952 he was one of only three sergeants who were chosen to represent the RUC at the funeral of King George VI. He retired in 1959 and he and his wife Elizabeth whom he had married in 1936 went to live at Finaghy outside Belfast.

Sadly Elizabeth died in 1992 when they lived at Moira in Co. Down, and Andrew continued there for another four years before a period in hospital forced him to move to Cullybackey, Co. Antrim, where he remained until a few weeks before his death.

Andrew had many interests and hobbies. These included photography, gardening and nature. Even in recent years he enjoyed being out in the garden planting flowers and watching the wildlife, but his greatest love was probably astronomy.

His interest in astronomy began when as a young boy on his father's farm, he studied the stars on clear nights and wondered what they were. Then one day at school he swapped his pocketknife for a small Boy Scout telescope, and the marvellous views of the starfields, even as seen in such a small instrument, aroused in him his love of astronomy that he retained for the rest of his long life. He always counted as his greatest moment, the occasion when he first saw the planet Saturn with its marvellous rings through the big 10-inch (25cm) refractor at the Armagh Observatory, and until very recently still observed with a Vixen 4-inch (102mm) refractor which he had bought on his 89th birthday! With this telescope his astronomical career had reached a new beginning.

In the early years he was very much a lone worker, carrying out his observations and reading up by himself. Then one day shortly after WW2, while stationed in Poyntzpass, Co. Armagh, his rector invited him to come and lecture on astronomy to the Church Youth Guild. Having no illustrations he contacted Armagh Observatory for the loan of some slides. His call was taken by the late Dr Ernst J Öpik, and not only did he loan him the slides, but invited him to become a member of the then Armagh Centre of the Irish Astronomical Society, now the IAA.

For a number of years he was Chairman of the Belfast Centre of the IAS and was so when I joined back in 1968, and to a young boy at that time, he was like a father- figure. In later years he was elected President of the IAS, which at that time covered all Ireland and was the highest post attainable in amateur astronomy in Ireland. I was honoured when three years ago in my capacity as Chairman of the East Antrim Astronomical Society, we invited him to become Honorary Life Member, a position that made him very proud to accept.

Andrew was a Committed Christian, and like King David of old, he was convinced that "The Heavens declare the Glory of God", and he always regretted that few, if any, astronomical writers give to God the credit of being the creator, controller, and upholder of the Universe.

By John McConnell FRAS