

Moore Than Meets the Eye

By Tony Goudie

The British astronomer Sir Patrick Moore CBE FRS FRAS died peacefully at his home in Selsey, Sussex on Sunday, 9 December 2012 following a short illness. He would have been 90 on 4 March 2013, having been active in astronomy for an astonishing 83 years.

Patrick Moore had many friends, and being an outspoken man, a few adversaries, too.

But I was amongst his friends, having met him in early 1955 when I was just twelve years old and he was thirty-two. I have known only a few people longer who are still alive. So maybe this short appreciation of my friendship will bring *Inside Life* readers some other aspects of an

extraordinary life that might not otherwise appear in the media.

My mother Muriel had taken me to the Hampstead Scientific Society meetings not far from Golders Green, where he had been invited to speak. That encounter started me off on both my astronomical journey and our close friendship.

When we met, the long-running TV programme 'The Sky at Night' (Patrick completed 710 'Sky at Night' programmes.) was still two years in the future, as was the Queen's first televised Christmas address and the first Sputnik. Einstein was still alive (he died in April 1955).

Patrick Moore and I used to meet regularly. I stayed with him both in East Grinstead and then in Armagh, where he lived for a little while, along with his beloved opera singer mother Gertrude and many cats. He moved

down to Selsey by the sea, just south of Chichester, over 40 years ago—a site that provided excellent southern skies over the Channel (providing the weather was good!).

We would observe the sky at these locations when clear until at least 4.00am, with pipes and strong coffee to keep us going.

At that time he became actively involved in—amongst many other things—cricket, chess, music, and practical jokes. (He never really thought he grew up!) Patrick stayed with my parents Don and Muriel when TV first beckoned. I remember him doing our breakfast washing up in the sink, and making light of a heart condition which threatened to have taken his life as a young man.

Like Winston Churchill, David Attenborough, Neil Armstrong, and others, he was a man for a moment.

Television was in its early days and space travel was for the future. Astronomy was mostly considered rather a boffin's pursuit.

He wrote over 100 popular books that changed all that, each one on an old 1908 Woodstock typewriter, and with only his two middle fingers. He gave away most of his fortune during his life, sending children to college and university, and buying telescopes for kids (I was one of them). In the



Tony Goudie with his friend, the late Sir Patrick Moore

early days he and Richard Hearne (TV's 'Mr Pastry') provided money for swimming pools for disabled children.

An 'Amateur' in His Field?

Patrick Moore came on the scene in a whirlwind of enthusiasm. He could speak to a hall of 500 people with no sound system and hold everyone's attention with his staccato delivery and humour. But he always considered himself as 'an amateur' (which actually means a lover of a subject), claiming he never did a day's work in his life because he so much enjoyed what he did! He was certainly somewhat eccentric both in appearance and manner, (he had worn a monocle since age 16) which really only served to endear himself to many—but not all.

About a year ago I asked Sir David Attenborough whether he could join Sir Patrick for a possible TV *Panorama* documentary. Both were Knights of the Realm, both were pioneers in the early television days, both were also respected in their fields, and both were in their eighties. One knew so much of what lay above the horizon and the other what lay below. But sadly it was not to be.

I took one of our two sons to meet Sir Patrick a few years ago. I wanted this link with the past to go on another generation, with a man who is in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest presenter of any television programme. (He only missed one recording in over 700 monthly 'Sky at Night' episodes due to 'a dodgy duck egg' and the salmonella poisoning which nearly killed him.) A pacemaker then undoubtedly gave him a few more years of life.

Our 23 year-old Alexander will now be able to remember that he once met a man who knew one of the pioneer Wright aviators: Orville, who died at the end of January 1948. Patrick Moore took the piano part for Albert Einstein, who once wanted to play Saint-Saens' 'Swan' from *The*

Carnival of the Animals on his violin. He met Serge Rachmaninoff, Yuri Gagarin (the first man in space), and all the 'moon men', including Neil Armstrong, whom he interviewed. Patrick played the xylophone at a Royal Command Performance (he also wrote brass band music and a number of operas), danced on a Morecambe and Wise Christmas Special, knew comedians Arthur Askey, Michael Bentine, and Les Dawson, among many others. He also appeared on most game shows of the 70s and 80s, being awarded a BAFTA for his services to television in 2001, the same year that he received his knighthood from Prince Charles.

Many people, including a whole generation of today's astronomers, are so thankful for his efforts and for his great personal concern and accessibility. He was never ex-directory, wanting anyone, especially the young who wished to contact him, to do so with minimum delay.

Patrick Moore was one of those in life who, when you met him, made you feel so special, just as if nobody else was around at that moment.

The Queen guitarist Brian May, who had appeared alongside Patrick Moore on a TV programme, was among those paying tribute to the late star, saying: 'Patrick will be mourned by the many to whom he was a caring uncle, and by all who loved the delightful wit and clarity of his writings, or enjoyed his fearlessly eccentric persona in public life. Patrick is irreplaceable. There will never be another Patrick Moore. But we were lucky enough to get one.'

Death, not the Final Frontier?

Patrick Moore was not religious, but the older he became, the more he was sure death was not the end of things. He made provision on March 4th this year for a party at which a candle was to be lit. He said he would do his **** best to blow it out during the toast. 'Quite a show—plenty of drink', he said!

He and I often talked about Christianity. He knew I was a minister but the conversation never seemed to go anywhere. I am sure he will be absolutely amazed when he realises that the loving mind of God was and is behind all that he enjoyed in life. It will be such a different and such a marvellous experience.

He never married. Patrick mourned his first and last love Lorna, killed by a German bomb as she drove an ambulance during the War when they were both just 17. He was once asked whether he ever thought of her since then. He said that maybe he could go half an hour without Lorna coming to mind. One day they will be re-united, and perhaps we can all learn a lesson about devotion to another, who should never be out of our love and thinking, either.

Pat and I had a friendly hug a month or so before he died, both knowing that time had caught him up. At 89 years there was not much left, and he was in poor health. He made his last programme only a few days before dying. His final 'good night' at the end was especially poignant after 55 years. Two million watched the repeat, shown following his death.

I suppose a bit of me has gone as well now. I have had the privilege of seeing someone through the span of life from 32 to 89 years of age.

Patrick Moore was a kind man who excelled in so many fields with the gifts he was given. A star indeed, awaiting, as will be Sir David Attenborough one day, 'the new heaven and the new earth' wherein dwells righteousness.

He will indeed be sorely missed by many. And I am only just one of them.

Tony Goudie is a pastor in the UK. This article was first published in the Winter 2012-2013 issue of *The Plain Truth* (<http://www.plain-truth.org.uk>). Reprinted by permission.