

IN REMEMBRANCE OF BRIAN MARSDEN

by Albert Jones (Nelson, New Zealand)

I first had the pleasure of meeting Brian Marsden (and Elizabeth Roemer) when they visited Wellington on their way to a meeting of the International Astronomical Union in Australia. They brought with them a Comet Medal from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, to be presented to me.

In the years that followed, I valued occasional correspondence with Brian by airmail and later by email.

When I learned in 2000 that he was handing over as head of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams (CBAT) to Dan Green, I thought he was retiring and wished him well in retirement. He emailed back that he was not retiring but was staying on at CBAT in support of Dan Green. He also mentioned that as it was 54 years since I had found a comet, it was time that I found another one. That was easier said than done — although in the mid-1940s I had spent some time searching for new comets, but I was unsuccessful. The only comet I found then was when I was star-hopping to a variable star and a comet got in the way! Following that I spent telescope time on known comets and variable-star observing.

Therefore, in 2000, I carried on with my favourite variable stars and a few months later, while star-hopping to variable star T Apodis, I happened to notice a nice comet, which I thought must be already named. I phoned Alan Gilmore at Mount John Observatory and told him that I had come across a nice comet and asked him for its name. Alan replied that he had not heard of a comet in that region and decided to inform the CBAT. Next, I heard from Brian that it might be the comet reported by Syogo Utsunomiya a week earlier but had become lost, and if it was the same comet, he suggested where to look for it. That prediction was correct and the comet received the designation and name C/2000 W1 (Utsunomiya-Jones).

Subsequently, Brian wrote “I told you what to do”!!!

A few years later, when Brian came to New Zealand, he visited Nelson. My wife Carolyn and I had the pleasure of meeting him and entertaining him in our home.

The next time he came to Nelson, he was accompanied by (his wife) Nancy, and so we had the pleasure of knowing her as well. They planned to return to New Zealand at a later date, but sadly that was not to be. We felt privileged to know Brian and Nancy. Now we are left with lovely memories of a true gentleman and his wife that will be with us forever.

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IN REMEMBRANCE OF BRIAN G. MARSDEN

by Maik Meyer (Limburg, Germany)

During November 2010, I found several pre-discovery images of long-period comets in the course of research work for volume 6 of *Cometography*. As usual, I sent those to the Minor Planet Center and copied Brian Marsden into these e-mails, who responded and told me which of those he might include in the next batch of *Minor Planet Circulars*. Around mid-November, I found another one and e-mailed it as well, and added some other questions. Surprisingly, no answer came. I know, in these times of quick communication, we all expect the answers as quickly as we send it, but in fact Brian usually responded within 24 hours. On the evening of November 18, I knew why no answer came, and that finally an era was over.

When I started comet observing, the name of Brian Marsden was that of a hero, an untouchable person in the higher spheres of astronomy. After I became interested in cometary orbits, his name appeared everywhere, and after my interest was awakened for a comet group of sungrazing comets — the Kreutz group — I noticed he was also a key scientist for this special field. Over the years, he would become my invisible companion of my amateur astronomical work, although I never suspected in the very beginning that I would really meet him, talk with him, and even be encouraged by him.

I first met Brian at the International Workshop on Cometary Astronomy (IWCA II) in 1999 in Cambridge, England, but I do not remember to have dared to talk to him. This changed during the coming years when my interests focused more towards the history of astronomy and cometary orbits, including linkages and identifications. In early 2002, I found a comet doublet, which later became a triplet, in astrometrical data of SOHO comets. Brian agreed with my findings and gave credit to me in the *MPECs*. Then, a few days later I found an additional three comets having the same orbital elements as the former three, according to my re-calculations that I sent to Brian. It took nearly ten days — and I felt a bit uneasy why it took so long — until the *IAU Circular* came out reporting and confirming my find. But guess what? Brian had detected another four comets with similar orbital elements! So the *IAUC* did not only announce the discovery of the Meyer group, but also of the Marsden group of sungrazing comets. One of my deepest impressions during these events was that Brian actually listened to me, an amateur! He did not talk down to me, and he did take me seriously. This experience was, as it later turned out, one of his main characteristics. He didn't regard amateurs as not capable of doing useful work. On the contrary, he encouraged and helped with always-friendly responses to all enquiries.

Also in 2002, the international conference “Asteroids, Comets, Meteors” took place in Berlin, Germany. I knew that Brian wanted to present a paper on the new comet groups, and I intended to visit the conference for one day. I went there with Sebastian F. Hönl, who had shortly before discovered comet C/2002 O2, the first amateur comet discovered since 1946 from Germany. What Brian did, after his main presentation, was to say that he was honored to welcome a visual comet discoverer and the discoverer of the Meyer group, and he urged us to stand up. The whole auditorium applauded,

and Brian was smiling a very big smile, seeing our embarrassment. During the meeting I had several opportunities to discuss with him several topics and was impressed by his uncomplicated kindness.

His sense of humor also appeared every now and then in his e-mails. When I suggested to him, together with Rainer Kracht, discoverer of a third comet group in SOHO data, to name a minor planet after Heinrich Kreutz, he agreed and said that this is the way how “we three small ‘groupies’ honor the memory of the master!”

In the course of the following years, I was quite successful in pre(dis)covery work, as well as with identifications of long-lost comets. Brian always gave credit to me, even in cases when I was not able to demonstrate the identity based on all data available. Moreover, he responded very often by encouraging me to go on, and saying that it was good work. Brian also accepted new different orbital solutions if one was able to demonstrate that the found solution was more reasonable. I can’t think of anything better to motivate amateur work.

So in the end, Brian was a constant and important factor in my amateur astronomical career. Without him and his support, I would surely not have achieved what I have. He influenced my work to a large amount, and one of my proudest moments was when I accompanied Brian at a panel discussion at the IWCA III in 2004 in Paris, sitting next to him.

What will be next? Who will fill in his shoes? Who will continue this extraordinary work on cometary orbits? Additionally, we have lost someone who was a walking encyclopedia of the history of astronomy and could always provide valuable information that was especially important for the *Cometography* series. I would never have thought that the death of a man that I have met only three times and with whom I communicated mainly via e-mail would touch me so deeply — but it says much about the importance and magnitude about this man and his impact on others.

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