

The British Astronomer Sir Patrick Moore CBE FRS FRAS died peacefully at his home in Selsey Sussex at 12.25pm on Sunday December 9th following a short illness and surrounded by his close friends holding his hands, with a taste of brandy on his lips ('One for the road' as he used to say), and with his piano being played in the next room. His three adult adopted 'sons' were with him, taken on when their mothers died in different circumstances years ago.



A good way to go, and a good way to celebrate a long life. Patrick Moore would have been 90 on March 4th next year, having been active in astronomy for an astonishing 83 years and presenter of the world's longest TV programme with the same host. It always reminded me of Alastair Cooke and his long series 'Letter from America'. He had so many friend, and being outspoken a few adversaries as well. I was only just one of those friends having met him in early 1955 when I was twelve and he was thirty two. I have known only a few people longer who are now still alive. Maybe this short appreciation of my friendship will bring some other aspects of his extraordinary life that might not be in the papers.

My mother Muriel had taken me at age 12 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 was still two years in the future as was the Queen's first television Christmas address and the first Sputnik. Einstein was still alive (he died in the April 1955). Patrick Moore and I used to meet regularly.

I stayed with him both in East Grinstead, and then in Armagh in Northern Ireland, where he was invited to build and open their planetarium. He lived for a little while at 4 The Mall with his beloved opera singer mother Gertrude and the many cats which he loved. Fed up with the local 'troubles' Patrick then moved down to Selsey by the Sea just south of Chichester 45 years ago - a site that provided excellent southern skies over the Channel (providing the weather was good!). Mrs Moore died in 1981. His father actually went to Highgate School in North London where I attended 1950-1960, years after his father. Patrick and I would observe the sky at the three homes where he used to live (when skies were clear!) until at least 4am, with our pipes and strong coffee to keep us going. At that time he became actively involved in many other areas - cricket, chess, music and practical jokes - (he never really thought he grew up!)

Patrick stayed the night on many occasions with my parents Don and Muriel in Golders Green North London when London TV first beckoned. I often 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, Patrick Moore 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 done on an old 1908 Woodstock typewriter and with just 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 early days he and Richard Hearne - 'Mr Pastry' of TV fame - provided money for swimming pools for disabled children.

Patrick Moore came on the scene in a whirlwind of enthusiasm. He could speak to a hall of 500 with no sound system and hold everyone's attention with his staccato delivery and humour. He always considered himself an amateur (which actually means a love 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 which really only served to endear himself to many (but not all). He had worn a monocle since age 16 to correct a lazy eye.

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 and both were pioneers in the early television days. Both were respected in their field 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 720 monthly Sky at Nights about 10 years ago due to 'a dodgy goose egg' and the salmonella poisoning which nearly killed him.) A pacemaker then undoubtedly gave him those few more years of life. He carried an organ donor card which I believe said 'You can have the lot'!

Our twenty three year old Alexander will now be able to remember he once met a man who knew one of the pioneer Wright aviators - (Orville died 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, met Yuri Gagarin the first man in space and all the Moon men including Neil Armstrong whom he interviewed, played the xylophone at a Royal Command performance (PM wrote a number of operas and brass band music), danced on a Morecombe and Wise Christmas Special, knew comedians Arthur Askey, Michael Bentine and Les Dawson among many others, and 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.

Patrick Moore always wished he had a recording of his duet with Albert Einstein, and now I too wish I had recorded the piano music PM and I used play together! I also admired (but was not allowed to touch) his xylophone which he played at a Palladium Royal Command performance years ago.

Many people including whole generation of today's astronomers over the past 50 years are so thankful for his efforts and for his great personal concern (he was never ex-directory wanting anyone, especially the young who wished to contact him, to do so with minimum delay. Now the phone just rings and rings). He was one of those in life who, when met, made you feel so special just as if nobody else was around at that moment. The Queen guitarist Brian May who has appeared alongside Patrick Moore on the TV programme was among those paying tribute to him 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.” Patrick and Dr Brian May who is actually also a qualified amateur astronomer, became close to the end. It may be that Dr May might succeed PM on TV but that is for the future with decisions to be made; now the end of a particular era has come. Patrick Moore was not religious in the traditional sense, but the older he became the more he was sure death was not the end of things. 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 has made provision on March 4th next year which would have been his 90th for a party at which a candle will be lit. He said he would do his *** to blow it out during the toast! “Quite a show – plenty of drink” he said.

Patrick never married. He mourned his first and last love Lorna, killed by a German bomb as she drove in 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 surely will be re-united (and perhaps we as Christians can learn a lesson about devotion to Another Who should also never be out of our love and thinking either). Pat and I had a friendly hug a month or so ago both privately knowing that time has 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 ‘goodnight’ at the end was especially poignant after 55 years. Two million watched the repeat shown following his death. Not being married and surviving happily on 4-5 hours a night meant he was able to produce so much over his long life. I do think a bit of me has gone as well now. I have had the privilege of seeing someone through most of the human span of life from age 32 to 89.

Patrick Moore was a kind and very generous man who excelled in so many fields with the gifts he was given. He gave almost all his money to sending young people to College and buying telescopes. I was one of those with a telescope.

So a star indeed waiting, as will be Sir David Attenborough one day, for the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein dwells Righteousness (Rev 21.1). He will indeed be sorely missed by many.

And I was only just one of them.
Tony Goudie.