

DR ERIC LINDSAY: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

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Abstract: Personal recollections of Eric Lindsay are related by Derek McNally, a former Director of the University of London Observatory.

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Eric Lindsay was a highly charming man. He was responsible for getting me interested in astronomy. Indeed, I had thought of Armagh when I finished at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) in 1957, although Dunsink was a more interesting prospect. But I finally succumbed to Bill McCrea as my chances for a Ph.D. were better outside the Irish observatories in those days.

However, Eric helped me enormously in crystalizing my ideas. Time was no object for him if he was helping a young person (much to his secretary's disgust). I had been very taken with the seminars that the Armagh people gave at QUB as an undergraduate, and astronomy seemed an exciting way to go—even if I had sworn that astronomy was a 'no-go area' at school.

Eric Lindsay and Ernst Öpik were 'star turns' (at the risk of a pun). Eric believed that physicists were not quite *au fait* with indices—so he wrote out all the zeros for their benefit. One could see Ernst count the zeros and then interrupt: "n zeros too many/too few, Eric, I think".

Sometimes they would dispute fine issues of esoteric (or so it seemed) astrophysics, oblivious of the audience. Astronomy was both entertaining science and entertaining.

We also came to expect 'long' seminars from Ernst, and of course the reciprocal double act. So those two have much to answer for.

Once an accredited astronomer, I found Eric's secretary much less protective of him. But he was still the

source of much good advice—although opportunities to meet him declined as a consequence of geography.

When Bill McCrea was Professor of Mathematics in Belfast, he got on very well with Eric. Bill recounts that Eric did not fit easily into military discipline during World War II. Apparently Eric was often found wanting in the saluting of senior officers—a smile and a nod did for Eric!

You can see I have some very warm memories of the Armagh crowd in the 1950s and 1960s; had it not been for Eric I might have ended up at Culham, in search of fusion-generated power. What an escape!

Derek McNally has spent much of his astronomical working life at the University of London Observatory, serving both as Assistant Director and Director. During the 1960s his research focused on the interstellar medium and star formation, but in the 1970s he turned towards observations of interstellar spectra—in particular the enigmatic diffuse interstellar bands. He has also been much concerned with tertiary education in astronomy through the astronomy degree at University College London. He has served as Secretary and Treasurer of the Royal Astronomical Society and as General Secretary of the International Astronomical Union (1988–1991), and was honoured by the IAU when minor planet (4326) was named 'McNally'. In retirement he has been concerned with adverse environmental impacts on astronomy and the protection of observational astronomy.