

Return to the Far Side of Planet Moore!

Martin Mobberley

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Rambling Through Observations,
Friendships and Antics of Sir Patrick Moore

 Springer

Martin Mobberley
Denmara
Cockfield, Suffolk, UK

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Preface

Within days of my Patrick Moore biography being published in August 2013 (entitled *It Came From Outer Space Wearing an RAF Blazer!*), I started receiving huge amounts of e-mail. The vast majority of these messages were from amateur astronomers based in the UK, typically aged in their early sixties, who had been inspired both by Patrick and by the NASA Apollo Moon landings of their youth. From childhood or their teenage years, they had always been big fans of the phenomenon that was Patrick Moore and it seemed unbelievable that he was no longer around. Of course, as a national institution for more than half a century, there was already plenty of information about Patrick in his books and online; but what these fans craved was the true life story of the man, and it seems my book delivered the goods. It was a ‘warts and all’ account for sure, but not a sycophantic hagiography, which many had feared it would be. I was quite surprised that so many people, including other former TV astronomers, actually phoned me up or e-mailed me, before and after the book was published, expressing amazement that I was brave enough to write an honest biography about such an iconic figure. ‘There’ll be a witch hunt’ they warned me. ‘You will be lynched by the baying mob’ some said. One author told me that he had never dared say a bad word about Patrick because he ‘Would surely be beheaded at an astronomy meeting, with a meat cleaver!’ Hmmmmm... Well, none of these things happened, but people continued calling me ‘brave’ and many said I had ‘guts’ to write it, but perhaps the most reassuring praise came from fellow biographers and historians of renown. Dr. Simon Mitton, the Royal Astronomical Society’s Vice President at the time of the book’s publication, described the book as ‘a wonderful record of Patrick, who was by turns an enigmatic character, a spoilt child, a practical joker, an engaging speaker, and a personal friend...’ But perhaps the greatest praise of all came from the noted historian and public speaker Dr. Allan Chapman, who wrote to me from Oxford University, saying ‘I really must let you know how very much I am enjoying your RAF Blazer biography of our dear late friend Sir Patrick. I think that you have struck exactly the right balance: how to write a sharp and penetrating biography while still displaying a deep affection for the man and his fables’. To me, that single letter more than justified the 11 years I spent on the project, from the first words until its final publication.

However, what really did surprise me even more was that I started receiving suggestions, within weeks of the book's release, that I should write a sequel. Amazingly 330,000 words about Patrick was not enough for some readers: they craved even more of Moore! At first I dismissed such a crazy idea. For a start I was mentally drained from the project which had occupied my life for more than a decade. In addition *It Came From Outer Space Wearing an RAF Blazer!* (or 'RAF Blazer' as I shall refer to it from now on) was very comprehensive, covering Patrick's life from birth to death along with almost everything he did along the way. What more could I possibly write without endless repetition? Well, in many ways those same readers answered my questions as, very quickly, various suggestions and anecdotes flooded in. One reader told me he would continue to re-read 'RAF Blazer' every year until a sequel appeared (he added that he also re-read Leslie Peltier's splendid 'Starlight Nights' every year as well). Clearly the chronicle of Patrick's life could not be re-written, but I could still have an entertaining ramble through specific parts of his life that I had only touched upon in 'RAF Blazer' but which seemed to fascinate the readers.

From the 400+ messages I received it was very clear that readers would like to see some of the drawings that Patrick made of the Moon and planets, especially in his early observing years. So, I have included a section on these, even though, by today's digital imaging standards, they look rather basic, even childlike. The bizarre and sorry tale of O'Neill's mythical bridge attracted much interest too, so I have included all Patrick's sketches of the feature in this new book. His house *Farthings* was mentioned in many e-mails I received. Many amateur astronomers contacted me saying that Patrick had told them 'If you are ever in Selsey, do drop in'. They assumed he was joking and so never made it to Selsey. After reading 'RAF Blazer' they realised Patrick was not joking. Visitors, as long as they were fans, were always welcome. As a result, many messages were received along the lines of 'After reading your book I am cursing myself for never making it to Selsey... What was *Farthings* like? What other amateur astronomers lived in Selsey?' I have tried to address many of these issues and to say more about some of Patrick's best mates, where readers craved extra information.

So, for those who simply cannot get enough of Patrick, I hope you enjoy these additional snippets about his life. One word of warning though: to understand many of the new tales in this book you really do need to have read the original 'RAF Blazer' behemoth first, at least for the anecdotes to make perfect sense. This book has been written purely in response to the original readers' requests or pleas and for no other reason. This is not an alternative biography of Patrick, but a sequel to my original book. There are, of course, many repetitions and overlaps with 'RAF Blazer'. This is, frankly, unavoidable. However, I think, and hope, that there is enough new stuff to keep the reader entertained and again temporarily fill the void that Patrick left when he departed. Good points and bad points he was a one-off and an endless source of fun and entertainment.

Finally, Patrick was a member of the British Astronomical Association for 78 years, an organisation that shaped his life and, essentially, produced the back garden amateur astronomer who became a public institution. It was the BAA that created Patrick's love of astronomy, not the BBC. To join the BAA (which I highly recommend), go to <http://britastro.org/> or write to: The British Astronomical Association, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London. W1J 0DU.

Cockfield, UK
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Martin Mobberley

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