Brian Warner

One of South Africa's great traditions, now 300 years old, has been our participation in the global network of scientists coming and going to and from this country in pursuit of knowledge, understanding and truth. The first of these scientists to make a mark was a German doctor, Peter Kolb, who arrived here in Cape Town in 1705 where he was to live for ten years studying all manner of things that were new to European eyes: animals; plants; the customs of the Khoe and much else besides. Two generations later a new wave of scientists arrived in Cape Town including two Swedish botanists (trained by Linnaeus) Thunberg and Sparrman, a French ornithologist Francois le Vaillant, a Dutch soldier-explorer Robert Gordon and then, from England, William Burchell the great naturalist. He in turn was followed by Sir John Herschel the astronomer who was to have such an influence on Charles Darwin who met him here in Cape Town in 1836 on the last leg of the voyage of the Beagle. This global network of scientists was enriched not only by those born and educated here who left to shine elsewhere like Basil Schonland, Max Theiler, Allan Cormack, Aaron Klug, Sydney Brenner and Jonathan Dorfan but also by those who came and stayed, like Raymond Dart and Robert Broome who---based in South Africa---- revolutionised our understanding of the origins of human beings.

The arrival in 1972 of the young Brian Warner as Professor of Astronomy in the department he was to head at UCT for the next 32 years was to be no less enriching. For Brian Warner has been an extraordinary teacher, a researcher at the cutting edge of his discipline and a leading member of the community of star-gazing scholars around the world with whom, even before the days of the internet, he has found ways of keeping in touch. He also built his base into what must be one of the most exciting departments of Astronomy in the world and has been President of the International Astronomical Union

Brian Warner was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth and tells of working in his youth as a labourer, digging with a pick axe. But he was formidably intelligent and gifted with an encyclopaedic memory that seemed able to recall everything. Thus he won scholarships and made his way through university emerging not only with a mastery of mathematics but also an

enviable command of the English language plus a Ph.D and two D.Sc.s (University College, London and Oxford)

As a teacher he has supervised 18 Ph.D and another 14 Master's theses whilst also acting as an examiner for a dozen universities around the world, ranging from neighbouring Stellenbosch to Cambridge, Gottingen and Texas. One measure of his participation in the global network where he has been something of a pollinating bee for over thirty years has been his membership of the organizing committees of international meetings in twenty countries ranging from Chile to Thailand by way of Australia, Hungary, Spain and the United States.

Major books in astronomy have been combined with an unceasing stream of articles. The books include:

- High Speed Astronomical Photometry, CUP, 1988
- Variable Stars and Galaxies, 1992
- Cataclysmic Variable Stars, CUP, 1995 which is regarded as the 'bible' of its field

His list of articles begins with two in 1960 based on observations of Plato and Venus.[1] In 1970, article number 99 is on Lithium in C & S stars;[2] by 1984 there is no. 202 on Wind accretion in White Dwarfs[3] and twelve years later, no.310 on Dwarf Nova Outbursts.[4] By 2008 we have article no. 402 being an overview of the Properties of Novae.[5] And on it goes. It seems not impossible that Brian Warner will end up publishing more articles than Shane Warne's 708 test wickets !

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[1] Warner, B.: Rilles near the Lunar Crater Plato, *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, **70**, 299-300, 1960
Warner, B.: The Emission Spectrum of the Night Side of Venus, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society,* **121**, 279-283, 1960.

[2] Warner, B. and Dean, C.A.: Lithium in C and S Stars, *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific,* **82**, 904-908, 1970.

[3] Livio, M. & Warner, B.: Wind Accretion onto White Dwarfs, *Observatory,* **104**, 152-159, 1984

[4] Warner, B, Livio, M. & Tout, C.A.: Dwarf Nova Outbursts in Truncated Accretion Discs: Down with Low Alphas. *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society,* **282**, 735-738, 1996.

[5] Warner, B.: Properties of Novae: An Overview. In *Classical Novae*, eds. M. Bode and A. Evans. Cambridge University Press. pp 16 – 33, 2008.

But perhaps not, for Brian Warner does a lot else besides astronomy. He was Chairman of the Board of Extramural Studies for 8 years; a member of the Board of Trustees of the South African Museum for 10 years and chairman for another 8; a member of council of the South African Library for 10 years; and is a Life Member of the Friends of the South African Cultural History Museum; of the Michaelis Collection and of the Cape Natural History Club. His interest in history is manifest in the number of books that he has written about early astronomy and astronomers in the Cape. A recent article, not listed in the 409 above, written for the bicentenary is a fascinating analysis of the influence of Sir John Herschel, then Astronomer Royal at the Cape, on Charles Darwin who visited in 1836. Much of this scientific history has been recorded in books of which Cape Landscapes: Sir John Herschel's sketches 1834-1838 and Flora Herscheleliana (written with John Rourke) are the most notable. Happily Brian Warner is also a person with a great sense of humour as evidenced in two splendid books: Dinosaurs End: Scientific poems, 1996 and Scatalogical Verse, 2007 whence we derive these three gems:

The twinkle's gone my little star,
Since I learnt just what you are:
A sphere of gas that weight constrains,
Fired by proton-proton chains

The origin of time
And how and why it flows
Was known to Albert Einstein
And now to Roger Penrose
But where the time goes
God only knows.

For Robert Broom the Karoo was strewn
With fossils great and small
Of Saurian races and earlier traces
Of things that could hardly crawl.

And so, with apologies all round:

Brian Warner who started life wielding a pick
Has a brain in which everything will stick
So travelling into space, by way of Mars

It was he who nailed Cataclysmic Variable Stars.