

Former Kitt Peak Director Geoff Burbidge Passes Away



Dr. Geoffrey Burbidge, former Director of Kitt Peak National Observatory from 1978 to 1984 and astronomer at the University of California, San Diego passed away January 26th in San Diego. He was 84 years old. He was born in England in the Cotswolds in the small town of Chipping Norton, midway between Oxford and Stratford-on-Avon. When his father, a builder, found out that his son was good in mathematics, he wanted him to be an accountant. However, Burbidge studied Physics at the University of Bristol and received his Ph.D. in theoretical physics at University College London in 1951. He got into astronomy in an interesting way. He was fond of saying that while he was a graduate student he met an astronomer and married her and that is how he got into astronomy. He continued "Thus I don't always take very seriously people who say they have known from the beginning exactly what they wanted to do."

Burbidge is most famous for his work with his wife Margaret Burbidge, William Fowler, and Fred Hoyle that showed how all of the elements except the very lightest ones are produced by nuclear reactions inside stars. In 1957, they produced the seminal paper "Synthesis of the Elements in the Stars" which showed that all of the elements from carbon to uranium could be produced by nuclear processes in stars. Fowler received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1983 for work in this area. Dr. Burbidge was the recipient of many awards including the American Astronomical Society Warner Prize, the Royal Astronomical Society's Gold Medal, and the Catherine Wolfe Bruce Gold Medal in 1999 from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Burbidge was the society's president from 1974 to 1976.

The press release from the University of California San Diego is here.
<http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/newsrel/science/01-10Burbidge.asp>