

Address on the occasion of the unveiling of the Blue Plaque to commemorate the lives of Frank Bellamy MA FRAS FRMetS FRPSL and Ethel Bellamy MA FRAS.

By Bill Jackson, past President, Oxford Philatelic Society;

at 2 Winchester Road, Oxford, 11 a.m. Tuesday 8 October 2019

Chairman, Blue Plaque Board members, friends:

Frank Arthur Bellamy was born at 57 St John Street on 17th October 1863, the second child of bookbinder Montague Bertie Bellamy and Zilpah, née Butwell. He was baptised at St Mary Magdalen Church early the following year.

At the 1881 census, aged 17, he was a pupil at Magdalen College School. Ten years later he was living on what was then called St John's Road. In 1901 he was still living there, with his surviving sister Ada and, this time, also his niece Ethel Frances Butwell Bellamy, aged 29, a daughter of his brother Montague. Later Frank lived on Polstead Road, and finally here at 2 Winchester Road from 1930: Frank till his death in 1936, and Ethel here too until after her retirement in 1947.

Back in July 1881, shortly before his eighteenth birthday, he had been appointed Second Assistant at the University Observatory in the Parks, a position previously held by two of his brothers. During this apprenticeship under E. J. Stone the Observatory was occupied in meridian work – the surveying of the positions and movements of the stars. Routine meteorology was also added. With the death of his parents, Frank became at 22 head of the family household.

He described himself as a tutor in meteorology, astronomy and botany. In fact his main career was in astrography, the mapping of the stars. In 1892 he was selected by Charles Pritchard, Savilian Professor of Astronomy, to be his assistant. When Herbert Hall Turner succeeded to that chair, the share of the international *Astrographic Catalogue* project which Pritchard had accepted to oversee was just beginning. A suitable telescope had been presented by Warren de la Rue; and to Bellamy fell a large share of taking the plates, measuring some 400,000 star images at declination 25° to 31° North, reducing the measures, and preparing the results for publication. That a piece of work of this magnitude could be carried out in a reasonable time with such meagre staffing was mainly due to the ingenious methods of measurement and reduction introduced by Turner: but its completion within the relatively short period of ten years owed much to the enthusiasm and discipline

which Bellamy brought to it. Other observatories involved in the *Catalogue* included Santiago in Chile, the Nizamiah in Hyderabad, and the Vatican.

All told, he worked at the Radcliffe Observatory (the beautifully refurbished landmark between the Woodstock Road and Walton Street) for nine years, and for fully 46 at the University Observatory. The late Alan Hughes told us in his history of our Oxford Philatelic Society that Bellamy published 35 papers in astronomical journals between 1883 and 1901 alone. In 1904 he had found no. 4996, an open cluster in the constellation Cygnus, measuring 103 stars in the cluster. He was incorrectly credited with discovering this region, and only after finishing the work learnt that it had already been measured at Potsdam, having indeed originally been discovered by Herschel at Slough in 1786. In 1909 Bellamy published a 28-page book entitled *The international photographic survey of the sky*.

Fully deservedly, this plaque is to commemorate both Bellamy and his niece Ethel. In 1898, aged 17, she had started to help Frank on a part-time basis from home. I will leave it to Professor Karin Sigloch to give you an account of Ethel's similarly important contribution to astrography and to seismology.

Given that so much of Frank Bellamy's work involved cameras, it is not surprising that he was also a member of the Oxford Photographic Society. He had helped found it and was its Secretary from 1890 until 1892. But that year he resigned on some point of principle and joined the Banbury Photographic Club. In 1925 he donated his important photographs of changing Oxford to the City Library, where you can readily see them online.

He was a Life Member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and a member of the Ashmolean Natural History Society, of which he was at times President or Secretary. He was author of a history of that society's first quarter century, in 1905.

He had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1896. In 1905 he accompanied Turner on an expedition to Egypt to study an eclipse of the sun. For fifty-two years he also made observations for the Phenological Committee of the Royal Meteorological Society – which studied the timings of recurring natural phenomena. In our era of climate change, his work should surely constitute a significant point of reference from the past.

He took up early on the hobby of stamp collecting – at the expert level at which he pursued it, it is more properly designated philately. In 1892 he wrote to a fellow member of the OPS,

one E. W. B. Nicholson, later Bodley's Librarian, 'I have been a collector for nearly 25 years – certainly since I was 5 years old'. He was barely 29 when he became the OPS's founding Honorary Secretary under the Presidency of Dr, later Sir, James Murray of Oxford English Dictionary fame, and a committee of senior academics and others. Remarkably, he continued in that role and as Honorary Treasurer until 1936, with one break of three years only. As early as 1897 he had been a judge of philatelic literature at the London Philatelic Exhibition. He became a Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society of London in 1908. By ten years before he died, he was reported to have amassed a collection of more than 200,000 items relating to Great Britain, recognised as one of the very best in private hands, which he had hoped to see conserved intact through donating it to Oxford or Cambridge University.

Indeed, Queens' College Cambridge had accepted to receive the collection, but was then persuaded to decline in view, it appears, of the financial situation of the two nieces, Ethel and Edith, who lived with Frank and were dependent on him. So, sadly, his wish that the collection remain unbroken was not granted. However, the ending is not wholly sad – when it was sold, John Johnson, the then Printer to the University, obtained what he could of it, and with Bellamy's name attached made it a part of what is now the Bodleian's wide-ranging John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera.

Bellamy also published authoritatively on the hobby: on the College Messenger Postage Stamps, Envelopes, and Cards used in Oxford and Cambridge, which were suppressed at the demand of the Postmaster General as infringing his monopoly – an issue much debated since. And on the stamps then used by the Oxford Union Society.

Alan Hughes records that 'Bellamy was clearly meticulous and dedicated. But he could also be prickly'. In contrast we have a J. R. F. Turner writing in the *Oxford Times* that "those of us who knew him well have lost a friend whose sincerity and charming and kind ways endeared him to us all". This Turner was Senior Clerk to Oxford Local Examinations and played cricket for the county, a passion he shared with Frank, who had been Vice-President of the Oxfordshire Cricket Association since its inception in 1919.

We know that Frank had not been on speaking terms with the new Professor of Astronomy, H. H. Plaskett, for the last months of 1935. Soon after, he had a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, listed his complaints against Plaskett, and resigned. Two weeks later, on 15th February 1936, he died suddenly of angina, leaving only some £1,500 and believing that his collection was going to Queens', Cambridge. He had declined a pension, so that he

could go on working till the end. However, he had been awarded an honorary Master's from the University in 1905, as Ethel was to be in 1934. Just two days before his death he had read a paper to our Philatelic Society. His funeral took place from St Giles Church and he was buried in St Sepulchre's Cemetery.

An obituarist wrote of Bellamy's loyalty to two chiefs, E. J. Stone and Herbert Hall Turner:
I quote:

As a true son of Oxford, he was devoted to lost causes. In his interpretation of the proper bounds of astronomical science his vision was doubtless restricted by his earlier experience. Yet in going from one observatory at Oxford to the other he had passed at one step out of the visual into the photographic era. Later he had accepted without demur Turner's introduction of seismology into the work of the University Observatory. Fresh enterprises might have been embraced with ardour at an earlier age, but the power of adaptation was not inexhaustible. His view of what he conceived to be right was always fearlessly expressed, and discretion was not always to be reconciled with loyalty to his own convictions'

In 2012 Oxford's Museum of the History of Science held an exhibition entitled *Traces*. While assembling instruments for the event, the Museum staff wondered who the people were who left traces on them. "In our search to find out more, we were able to locate information on one person in particular, Mr. Frank Arthur Bellamy (initials F.A.B. on the instruments)." Well, it's a modest and recherché way of being remembered, but now amply compensated for by this plaque.

In my own inexpert judgment, from hindsight of course, he deserves to be remembered as a man from the Victorian school of inquisitiveness and improvingness; a man of great application and self-discipline; a man of both town and gown, yet perhaps not wholly embraced by either. A good friend but pugnacious in his own defence. A renaissance man, astrographer, philatelist supreme, author, botanist, phenologist, photographer, and cricket fan.

So, in a double celebration today we recall a very remarkable man and, now also, his equally admirable niece.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.