

Maunder [*née* Russell], Annie Scott Dill

(1868–1947)

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Maunder [*née* Russell], Annie Scott Dill (1868–1947), astronomer, was born on 14 April 1868 in Strabane, co. Tyrone, the second of three children and the younger daughter of William Andrew Russell (1824–1899), minister of the Presbyterian church in that town, and his wife, Hester (Hessy) Nesbitt Russell, *née* Dill, who belonged to a prominent Ulster family. She was educated at home and at the Ladies' Collegiate School (later Victoria College), Belfast. She entered Girton College, Cambridge, at the age of eighteen on an open scholarship and took part one of the mathematical tripos in 1889 with second-class honours. After a year as a mathematics mistress at the ladies' high school in Jersey she obtained a post at the Royal Greenwich Observatory in September 1891 as a 'lady computer', and was assigned to the solar department under [Edward Walter Maunder \(1851–1928\)](#). She also had to take her place with other computers on the observing rota for the transit circle, which meant regular night duty. Annie spent four years on the Greenwich staff, and resigned on 31 October 1895 before her marriage to Maunder on 28 December.

Annie Maunder continued with determination to pursue practical astronomy within the limitations of her new circumstances. She accompanied her husband on eclipse expeditions, three of which were favoured by good weather. With a modest grant from Girton in 1897 she acquired a short-focus camera, which she used with great success to photograph the outer solar corona in India in 1898, capturing a coronal streamer extending to fourteen solar radii, the longest ever recorded up to that time. This, and her other photographs of the corona and of the Milky Way, were included in *The Heavens and their Story* (1910), published under the Maunder's joint names but in fact principally her work.

Annie Maunder collaborated with her husband in his well-known work on the periodicity of sunspots. She also produced independently a catalogue of some 600 recurrent sunspot groups recorded at Greenwich (1907). Another, less fortunate, analysis (1907), showing an apparent east–west imbalance in the visibility of spots on the sun's surface during the previous sunspot cycle, caused some discussion among solar observers, but this was undoubtedly a spurious effect.

Mrs Maunder returned to her former duties at the Greenwich observatory as a wartime volunteer from 1915 to 1920. In 1916 she became a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, following the admission of women to membership. She had joined the British Astronomical Association as early as 1892 and served it assiduously in various capacities, including fifteen years as editor of its journal. In her later years she acquired an interest in ancient astronomies and came to be regarded as an authority in this field. Her very last paper (1936) was a revised estimate of the date for the origin of the constellations, which she placed at 2900 bc.

Annie Maunder survived her husband by almost twenty years, and died at her home, 52 Elms Crescent, Wandsworth, London, on 15 September 1947, in her eightieth year. She had no children.

Sources

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- The Witness* (Oct 1899)
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Archives

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Likenesses

- photograph, repro. in Brück and Grew, 'Family background of Annie S. D. Maunder'

Wealth at Death

£8912: probate, 9 Feb 1948, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*