



## RIPPING YARNS WITH PATRICK MOORE

I first met Patrick Moore at his home in Selsey on 7 February 1978. Over the next 35 years, I had the great pleasure of meeting him not only at his home, but also at various events and venues across Britain.

Patrick was an eccentric old-schoolmaster type who was no different in private to how he was in public. However, I did understand that not always what he said was true and that with the great man, you just had to take him as he was – wart and all.

Firstly, he was staunch British in every way and it is fair to say, Patrick did not always feel the love from continental Europe. Well, Germany to be precise. He once said in an interview that if he saw the entire German nation on a raft, he would do his best to sink it! Rather interesting, Patrick was a regular visitor to Darmstadt near Frankfurt during the 1980s, the home of the European Space Agency, and always said he received a warm welcome. In early years he blamed Hitler for bombing his town; which later became ‘Hitler killed my fiancé during an air raid.’ Who? This was all new.

Another story to emerge around the same time was during the war he played piano accompanying Albert Einstein on violin during a reception for an unspecified science meeting in New York. Err, the last yarn may not be correct as this is identical to an account to that of Reginald Waterfield, President of the British Astronomical Association back in the 1950s, who certainly did play piano to Einstein’s violin! Waterfield died in 1986, so Patrick had to wait an awfully long time to recall his own meeting with the great man of relativity, assuming no one had known Waterfield! When asked the piece they played together, Patrick firmly replied ‘Saint Saens of course – The Swan!’ Really?

Patrick could on occasions be male chauvinist and privately harboured concerns of the rise of women in authority. This included Margaret Thatcher and BBC women executives. Not one for covering up his politics either, this ‘Daily Telegraph’ avid reader went on to support the Independence Party in their campaign to “save the pound.” He later of course, completely denied any membership of any party or campaign!

Anyone who disagreed with Patrick became known simply as serpents! If you became a serpent, Patrick rarely allowed you back into his clique. I doubt that Arthur C Clarke, an old friend of Patrick’s, really became a “serpent” but Arthur was certainly close. Clarke had been helpful to Patrick in the early fifties in becoming a writer. At that time, Patrick wrote science fiction for boys. Celebrating fifty years of the Sky At Night in April 2007 with a large invited gathering to Selsey, suddenly Clarke appeared on a screen live from Sri Lanka. Patrick turned his back on the screen and made out he was not listening to Clarke’s testimony of the early years. Patrick’s supporters were ready to hiss at the screen one feels!

My final ripping yarn is one that was saved for me only. I visited him at his home in February 2011 and there, Patrick said, 'believe only one book on the history of astronomy, Agnes Clerke. Patrick had a first edition of Clerke's book written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Re-reading some of Patrick's work on the history of astronomy, I can see parallels in text and similarities with phrases. Somehow, Patrick had the right and his alleged plagiarism was never questioned! But I view this last story as a confession!

Patrick was Patrick. Much missed.