

OBITUARY: WILLIAM TOBIN (1953–2022)

James Lequeux

Observatoire de Paris-PSL-Sorbonne Université,
61 Avenue de l'Observatoire, 75014 Paris, France.

E-mail: james.lequeux@obspm.fr

William Tobin (Figure 1) passed away on 7 July 2022, following a long illness, in Vannes (France) where he had settled with his wife Laurence. Although not a member of the editorial staff of *JAHH*, he always showed great interest in our journal, in which he published several important papers and a number of book reviews. He was also very helpful in refereeing papers for *JAHH*.

Born in Manchester on 28 July 1953, William had dual New Zealand and British citizenship, and also European citizenship as he liked to add, saddened as he was by Brexit. After studying physics and astronomy in Cambridge (UK) and then at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, he obtained his PhD in 1979. He specialized in observational astronomy, in particular stellar photometry, while teaching at various levels. After a post-doctoral stay at the Observatory of the University of St Andrews in Scotland, in 1982 he joined the *Laboratoire d'Astronomie Spatiale* in Marseilles, where he worked until 1987, mainly on B stars in the Galactic halo and variable stars in the Magellanic Clouds.

From 1987 until he took early retirement in 2006 he taught astronomy at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch (New Zealand), where he directed a dozen astrophysics theses. He also spent time at the Institut d'Astrophysique in Paris, the *Laboratoire d'Astrophysique* in Grenoble and ESO in Chile.

William also had a great interest in the history of physics and astronomy, and in particular in Léon Foucault with his telescopes, pendulums and gyroscope. He wrote many well-documented papers about Foucault, on the determination of the speed of light, and on the transits of Venus. In 2003 he published *The Life and Science of Léon Foucault* (Cambridge University Press), a landmark book that



Figure 1: Dr William Tobin, was concerned that certain British nationals could not vote in the 2019 UK general election. His response to this was to stand as a candidate in Boris Johnson's constituency (photograph: William Tobin).

I translated into French. William played a very important role in putting in order the beautiful collection on Foucault at the Musée des Arts et Métiers/CNAM, in particular the balls of his pendulums, and also the Foucault collection at Paris Observatory. Together with Laurence Bobis, William and I organized an exhibition on Foucault at the Observatory. William also wrote many papers on the history of astronomy at various levels, which always were remarkable for their interest and accuracy, and often they included a very British sense of humor.

William was a very dear friend, with a remarkable general and scientific culture, and with whom collaboration was ideal. He will be greatly missed, not only by his wife and two daughters, but also by all those who knew him.

Papers Published in This Journal

- Tobin, W., and Holberg, J.B., 2008: A newly-discovered accurate early drawing of M 51, the Whirlpool Nebula. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 11, 107–115.
- Tobin, W., 2013. Transits of Venus and Mercury as Muses. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 16, 224–249.
- Tobin, W., 2016. Evolution of the Foucault-Secretan reflecting telescopes. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 19, 106–184 and 361–362.
- Tobin, W., 2021. Two photographic albums from the German transit of Venus expedition to the Auckland islands in 1874. *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 24, 823–861.