

Tribute to Geoffrey Perry (1928-2000)
UPI, by James Oberg
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Geoffrey Perry, a British schoolteacher who organized a worldwide network of amateur radio listeners to monitor the Russian space program, has died suddenly in Cornwall, England. He was 72.

According to family friend and colleague Max White, Perry was taken ill suddenly on the afternoon of Tuesday (January 18). He was rushed to Stratton Hospital, but was pronounced dead some 30 minutes later, following a heart attack which struck without warning.

Perry was affectionately regarded by his colleagues as an archetypical "English eccentric amateur" who had better knowledge and intuition about his area of expertise -- secret space activities -- than did academics or even government intelligence officials.

As a physics teacher at the Kettering Grammar School in the 1960s, Perry used hand-me-down short wave radios to allow his students to listen to transmissions from space satellites. They soon were able to discover and publicize many formerly top secret aspects of the Russian space program. He was soon joined in this endeavor by radio amateurs elsewhere in Europe, in North America, and in the Pacific. The loosely knit network of "space sleuths" became known as the "Kettering Group".

James Harford, the executive director emeritus of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, told UPI: "In the first years of the Space Age, Geoff Perry's 'Kettering Group' was of immense importance in providing the West with factual information on satellite launchings. We all owe Geoff a great debt for his work over the decades."

For his educational and investigative work, Perry was invested with the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by the Queen in 1973, and also was awarded the Jackson-Gwilt medal by the Royal Astronomical Society. The Kettering Group was awarded the Prince of Wales Trophy in 1983 by the Royal Aero Club, and Perry accepted on its behalf.

Mr. Perry's radio work with his students was highlighted in a "NOVA" television documentary, "The Schoolboys Who Cracked The Soviet Secret", which first aired in December 1989. The group continued to operate after Mr. Perry's retirement from teaching in 1984. Perry and his associates published numerous reports in the Journal of the British Interplanetary Society and in US government publications as well.

Sven Grahn, a Swedish radio amateur who first contacted Perry in the mid-1960s and is now a top official of the Swedish Space corporation in Stockholm, paid this tribute: "...Geoff was my mentor for 34 years. If there ever was a role model that I wanted to follow - it was his: scientific rigour, a minimalistic approach, a no-nonsense attitude to life, and a warm personality."

Perry recalled he was introduced to space flight while a teenager during WW2, when a German V-2 rocket crashed near his home in Braintree, northeast of London. In the early 1950s he also was

fascinated by the books of Arthur Clarke and by space satellites planned for the International Geophysical Year.

Together with fellow teacher Derek Slater, Perry began tuning in on Soviet satellites in 1960. In 1966, Perry first received worldwide attention for announcing the inauguration of a new Russian space launch center, at Plesetsk north of Moscow. Perry and his students had located the site by analysis of radio receptions.

The funeral is to be held on Wednesday, January 26th, at the Glynn Valley Crematorium, Bodmin, in Cornwall, Great Britain. He is survived by his wife, Jean Perry, and his daughter Isabel Carmichael, a science teacher.