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GEOFFREY E. PERRY MBE AND THE KETTERING GRAMMAR SCHOOL SATELLITE
TRACKING UNIT, CA. 1960 - 1984

Abstract

Geoffrey Perry (1927-2002) was an English physics teacher. He taught at the Kettering Grammar School in Northamptonshire, some 70 miles north of London, and is remembered particularly for his award-winning contributions to the art of satellite tracking. With colleague Derek Slater, Head of Chemistry and an amateur radio operator, he set up the school's Satellite Tracking Unit which in 1966 drew intense media attention with its announcing – having tracked Cosmos 112 - the existence of a previously unknown Soviet launch site at Plesetsk in northern Russia. Perry and Slater's satellite studies were notable for their being incorporated into the former's physics lessons, the students helping operate the equipment and gather the empirical data. Perry had started on this teacher/pupil collaboration when thinking about new ways of explaining the Doppler Effect to his classes. Rather than play recordings of passing train whistles or police car sirens he chose instead those of satellite transmissions following his listening to a play back of Sputnik at an education conference in 1957. Perry's work was in part enabled by a meticulous attention to detail which is manifest in the personal papers, recordings, log books, diaries, bespoke equipment and numerous other materials acquired by the Science Museum from his family in 2018. This paper draws from that archive to shed new light on Perry's work, seeking also to situate it within histories of scientific endeavour beyond the academy.