

British astronomer Bernard Lovell dies at 98

August 7 2012, by SHAWN POGATCHNIK



This Thursday Oct. 4, 2007 file photo shows founder of the Jodrell Bank Observatory Sir Bernard Lovell addressing guests at an event on the 50th anniversary of space travel, in Macclesfield, England. Pioneering British physicist and astronomer Bernard Lovell died, Monday Aug. 6, 2012. He was 98. Lovell was founder of England's Jodrell Bank Observatory and creator of its Lovell radio telescope. (AP Photo/Jon Super, File)

(AP) — Pioneering British physicist and astronomer Bernard Lovell, who developed one of the world's largest radio telescopes exploring particles in the universe, has died. He was 98.

The University of Manchester, where Lovell was emeritus professor of radioastronomy, said he died Monday in his home with many of his family members at the bedside. The cause of death was not announced.

"He was a towering figure, not just in Manchester or the UK, but

globally," said Dame Nancy Rothwell, president and vice chancellor of the University of Manchester.

Lovell was founder of England's Jodrell Bank Observatory and creator of its massive 250-foot-wide (76-meter-wide) radio telescope that has borne his name since 1987.

But three decades earlier, the half-built telescope was in danger of being mothballed because it had cost far too much to develop. Lovell credited the Soviet Union's Oct. 4, 1957, launch of Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, with saving his project.

Lovell's was the only Western device able to pinpoint and track Sputnik's booster rocket, a technology of grave Cold War concern to the West.

The rocket, Lovell recalled in a 2007 interview with The Associated Press, "was the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile and fortunately on Oct. 4, 1957, it carried a small piece of harmless scientific equipment. It could have carried a bomb."

Lovell also led an important World War II research project that developed the world's first radar system for scanning the ground. The H2S radar technology was used on British bombers from 1943 onward to identify ground targets at night and low visibility.

He is survived by four of his five children, 14 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements were not announced.

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