

## Gunter Archenhold, 1904-1999

Dr Archenhold died on the 21st February 1999, aged 94. He was a well known solar observer, working in Germany before the second World War and in Britain during and after the war. The famous Archenhold Observatory in Treptow-Berlin was founded by his father in 1896. It contained one of the largest refractors of the time; with an aperture of 68cm and a focal length of 21.1 meters it is even today the longest refractor in the world, and forms a landmark in Treptow as it protrudes like a huge gun through the observatory roof.

Gunter Archenhold was born on 28th August 1904 in Treptow-Berlin. He read Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy at the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin. From 1926 to 1936 he was assistant and later director of his father's observatory, then called Berlin-Treptow Observatory. He made visual, photographic and photometric observations of the Sun, planets, comets,

novae and of atmospheric phenomena. He lectured on astronomy and published many papers.

In 1936 he had to resign from his post under Nazi pressure and went to Zurich, where he continued his studies and researches. After receiving his PhD from Zurich University in 1938 he returned to Berlin. He was immediately arrested and put in a concentration camp where he spent the winter and suffered severe frostbite. Thanks to the help of English friends, Gunter was freed and given refuge in England. As a guest of Dr H. R. Hulme, then Chief Assistant to the Astronomer Royal, he wrote a paper on the 'Recurrence Interval of Magnetic Disturbances'. His father died in 1939, disheartened and frustrated.

In 1939 August, Dr Archenhold was granted a research scholarship by the Society for Protection of Science and Learning at the Solar Physics Observatory in Cambridge, where he worked with the spectrohelioscope and researched the distribution of sunspots over the sun's disk. From 1941 June onwards, he taught mathematics and physics at Wakefield and later at Otterden, Kent. In 1948 he became assistant master at Rivington & Blackrod Grammar School near Horwich.

Throughout his time as schoolmaster he kept records of haloes and investigated the statistics and structure of

sunspots. He retired at the age of 60 and maintained an active interest in astronomy. His last paper was published in the *Journal of the BAA* in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

The Treptow Observatory was renamed in 1946 'The Archenhold Observatory' and was renovated for a festive centenary celebration in 1996. On this occasion Gunter was represented by his son Fred Archenhold who conveyed his father's video message. He described the ocular of the great refractor as the gateway to the wonders of the Universe. In his younger days he was given the task of oiling the joints of the counter-balance and to this effect he had to crawl through the ocular aperture into the mighty tube; thus he could say that he knew the refractor inside-out!

Gunter Archenhold was the personification of kindness and enthusiasm for astronomy. It is an honour to have known him and his visits to our home were always a delight. I vividly remember how difficult it was for him to leave the eyepiece of my telescope when called for tea; the view of the Sun in H-alpha light was still a fascination for him. In later years, when he was no longer able to travel, I visited him regularly; his mood dramatically rose when we talked astronomy.

Gunter was a gentle and quietly spoken man with his own somewhat old-fashioned sense of humour. With his passing, the world has lost not only a remarkable astronomer but also a true gentleman.

Eric Strach

<sup>1</sup> Archenhold G., 'The solar atmosphere and the visibility of sunspots', *J. Brit. Astron. Assoc.*, 102(5), 274(1992)



The 68cm refractor at the Archenhold Observatory, Treptow-Berlin (Photograph by Brian Dougherty)