

# Mines and mining

## David Ewart Bick

FROM about 1910 my father and Ewart Bick (David Bick's father) were friends due to their common enjoyment of cycling, but I did not meet David - who was born on 20 July 1929 - until the late 1940s. My father and I were at that time endeavouring to put into production a plant for recovering the galena from old tailings dumps at Esgairmwyn Lead Mine in Ceredigion in Wales. Ewart and David drove up one day to see what we were doing, and I believe it was that visit which inspired his interest in metalliferous mines.

During the 1950s David and I covered a great many miles visiting old mines mainly, but not only, in Wales using the 'Bickwagon'. This was an old Morris car much altered by David and was quite different, and rather more powerful, than Mr Morris' original design. Spartan though it was and with inadequate brakes, it would go almost anywhere among and over the hills and never failed to get us home.

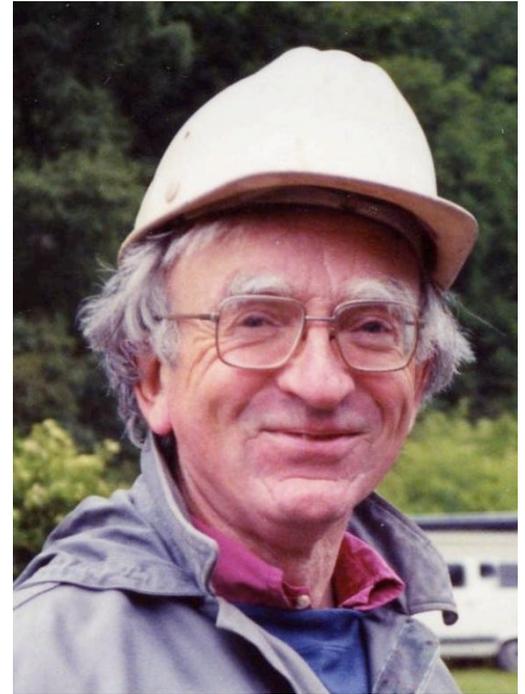
An early intention had been for us to jointly write a book on the mines of southern Wales, but we soon discovered that we rarely agreed on how to word a single sentence. We therefore settled on a geographical division for our respective writing, though still explored together.

David was not, however, only interested in old mines and his first book (apart from *A Short History of the Bickwagon*, 1960, price 6d) was *The Gloucester & Cheltenham Railway*, published in 1968. He continued with many titles on a variety of industrial archaeology topics such as railways, canals and quarries, but he is particularly well

known for his splendid six-part series on *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales*, the first of which was published in 1974. The final book he wrote - *Waller's Description of the Mines in Cardiganshire* - was published in 2004. His books form a great body of carefully researched and accurate information, as anyone who has read them will appreciate. David also wrote numerous articles, which I cannot attempt to enumerate.

He had a distinguished working career with Dowty's at Cheltenham, his first position being a stress engineer, making sure that the aircraft undercarriages (one of the company's products in those days) did not collapse during use. Those who knew him will be aware that David was practical as well as ingenious, so he was just the man for such a job. He later became a designer; indeed, an inventor. Probably his most distinguished effort was the Oleo Retarder, an extremely clever device that could be clipped, individually, to rails in marshalling yards and was capable of deciding for itself when a wagon was going too fast and could hold it back (an earlier invention, the Booster-Retarder, could also speed up wagons, but as marshalling yards began to be built with a slight gradient, this became a redundant feature). Large numbers of retarders are still in use on railways all over world.

In spite of this and earning many honours (B.Sc., C.Eng., M.I.Mech.E., F.S.A.), I have more than once heard David say that the best thing he ever did in his life was to found the Welsh Mines Society, which he did by inviting everyone he thought might be interested to an



**David Bick at the Welsh Mines Society meeting in the Forest of Dean, 1994. David's series *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales* is to be republished in two volumes, a dream he long sought**  
*Photo: Jeremy Wilkinson*

inaugural meeting at Dylife Mines in 1979. He long served as its editor and chairman and was its president at his death on 19 January 2006. If we can continue his enthusiasm and scholarship we shall do well.  
*George Hall*

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