
George Hall

Gerard Noel writes George was born in 1924. His father, Thomas Grainger Hall, was an old boy of Shrewsbury School, one of England's oldest and most respected public schools. His father (George's paternal grandfather) had been a master there.

His maternal grandfather, W.H.S. Colborn, had been involved with the railways in Derby and subsequently retired to Gloucester. He became a popular, if formidable, Methodist lay preacher. When he visited chapels he would only go by bicycle as he did not believe others should provide travel facilities on a Sunday. He had two daughters: Daisy and Linda. Daisy, a teacher and, unusually for the time, a graduate of Bristol University, married Tom Hall and was George's mother; she maintained her strict Methodist values throughout her son's upbringing. (Linda, George's aunt, was also a teacher and was engaged by my parents as a governess for me. Through her I met George, resulting in a lifetime friendship which we both enjoyed immensely.)

Tom Hall used to joke that he vowed he would never marry a teacher or a woman who wore glasses – he did both! Tom was something of a gentleman dilettante and, in spite of his background and education, decided to own a Gloucester bicycle shop. This he eventually did, at 25 Barton Street, where he advertised himself as 'Gloucester's Bicycle Man'. It was an amazing business: shortly after the war it was at one time staffed by four ex-public schoolboys and a female university graduate – not bad for a bike shop!

George's education was at St Wilfrid's prep school at Seaford in Sussex, followed by Wycliffe College at Stonehouse. During the war Wycliffe was evacuated to Lampeter in Cardiganshire, which no doubt played an important role in encouraging his love of Wales. He developed a lifelong interest in mines and mining and was for a short time at the Royal School of Mines in London. He was not a 'Bevin Boy' but volunteered for the mines for his National Service, which he spent in the Forest of Dean, initially for a short time as a coal miner and then as an iron miner.

Throughout his life he had three great loves: cycling, mines and Wales. Cycling was a natural consequence of his father's business and he enjoyed membership of the Speedwell Bicycle Club, based in Birmingham and one of the oldest and most prestigious cycling clubs, and of Gloucester City Cycling Club, founded in the city in 1891. Both Tom his father and Daisy his mother were one-time Presidents of the GCCC.

His interest in mines, principally UK metal mines, never ceased, and in later years he was a prominent member and later Honorary President of the Welsh Mines Society. His book *The Gold Mines of Merioneth* was a standard work, and ran to two editions.

As a consultant, he assisted Mark Weinberg (later Sir Mark) to reopen the Gwynfynydd Gold Mine in north Wales. Although the mine produced gold, it was not in sufficient quantity to be commercially viable (which it probably would have been at today's gold price); however, the owners were able to present of a kilogram bar of gold to the Queen on her 60th birthday in 1986.

With his father he formed the Elenith Mining Company which was intended to reopen the Esgair Mwyn Mine in Cardiganshire. The planning application was called in following objections from Welsh Water. To my astonishment, George asked me to present the company's case to the ensuing three-day public inquiry in Aberystwyth. To my further astonishment, we won our case against



formidable odds from the Water Board on grounds of pollution. Unfortunately Elenith's plans for the mine never reached fruition.

George amassed a comprehensive library and archive of books and documents relating to metalliferous mining, the most notable being his run of volumes of the Mining Journal. This was perhaps one of George's proudest possessions and he produced an index of the volumes in his possession. The collection together with the index proved an invaluable resource to many mining history researchers over the years.

His knowledge of the past mining industry supplemented his prodigious knowledge of Wales. On one cycling holiday we both climbed Snowdon from the Rhyd Ddu side. He was as at home in the mountains as he was underground exploring disused mines.

He was married three times: first to Maureen, by whom he had two sons, Thomas and William, secondly to Rosemary, and thirdly to Nheng, who brought considerable joy to his later years. He left one grandson, Samuel, by Tom and his wife Kirsten.

I have often found that friends have a favourite quotation. George would occasionally remind us of Longfellow's words: 'Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal.' – but always with a smile upon his face. So, let us not mourn his passing in the traditional sense, but rather celebrate the life of one who brought so much friendship and pleasure to us in his lifetime and ours.

Gerard Noel, with additional material from Will Hall

Simon Hughes writes George's familiarity with Cardiganshire commenced in the early 1940s when his school was evacuated to Lampeter for the duration of the war. His father, Tom, owned and ran a successful bicycle shop and ironmongers, at Barton Street in Gloucester, and young George was sent away with two-wheeled transport which empowered him to explore the area and brought him into contact with the lead mines. It was initially the common interest in bicycles, and mines, that threw him together with the late David Bick, then of Cheltenham.

Having been a student at the Royal School of Mines, after Lampeter, and facing being called up, George went to work as a volunteer in the Arthur & Edward (Waterloo) coal mine before transferring to the New Dunn iron mines, near Coleford, which was a particularly good apprenticeship. George's account of his time there was presented to the NAMHO conference in 1999 and printed in its proceedings.

In 1948 he persuaded his father, Tom, to embark on a mining venture where it was proposed to erect a new mill at Esgair Mwyn to process the jig tailings which would later be replaced with a primary feed from the old mine. Abandoned in 1928, it was a Crown mine with good prospects at depth. The new mill was designed in collaboration with R.R. Nancarrow, formerly captain of the Lisburne Mines from 1909. Some Williams of Aberystwyth jigs and a Holman table salvaged from the Lisburne mines and a ball mill from Graigwen were driven by a Brush 350 h.p. horizontally opposed twin diesel engine salvaged from a pencil factory in Gloucester. In the mid 1970s the layout was improved by building three flotation cells and converting from belt drive to electricity. The Brush engine was replaced with a six cylinder lorry engine driving a large alternator which significantly improved efficiency.

The original planning permission lapsed in 1973 and was not again granted until an enquiry had been held. The operating firm was the Elenith Mining Company, George being accompanied by Bob Gunn and Gerard Noel with Phil Ashton and Eric Burke as mechanic/fitters. It was not until the late 1980s that any mixed concentrate was recovered from the dumps but by then the market had changed; British smelters had ceased to trade and the value of mixed concentrates had declined.

In the early 1970s George was involved with the reopening of Force Crag barytes/lead/zinc mine in the Lake District. He was a director of Force Crag Mines (UK) Ltd (incorporated 1972, dissolved 1996). He was also involved as a consultant in the reopening and operation of Gwynfynydd gold mine from 1981 until 1988, as mentioned by Gerard above.

With Robin Daniel of South Western Mining & Tunnelling, part of the old Ceulan mine near Dylife was examined and sampled in the late 1980s. No workable reserves were found and the stoped area was greater than indicated.

In 1993 George started his Camdwr Bach/South Cambrian project which involved the clearing of about 100 metres of adit. The portal had been totally lost and a stream ran into a small opencast, which also required clearing. Under George's supervision, Hugh Ratzer and Rhidian Wilson undertook the task entirely by hand over a period of about a year on a part-time basis. The adit was eventually cleared to beyond the opencast but the good reserves shown on the old mine plans had been stripped out leaving only sub-grade material.

Later in that decade, George took a licence on the Wnion mine near Dolgellau and spent some time on sampling, pitting and geological mapping. He also held an interest in Scottish noble metals and it would be fair to say that there were very few mining districts in the UK in which he had not worked or participated in some form of proposed revival at one time or another.

One of George's specialities was the index of British mines he compiled from the Mining Journal over the last 30 or more years. For many years, George was an Affiliate of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy. When they merged with the Institute of Mining Engineers and vacated their premises at 44 Portland Place, London, much of their library was dispersed – George was in the right place at the right time, made an offer, and bought their holdings of the Mining Journal covering 1835–1914 with very few gaps. In 1988 George described his holding in 'British Mining Records' (NL 18 p. 10).

George worked with David James on the stratigraphical placing of the Plynlimon mine, which was published in the proceedings of the AusIMM Symposium Mine and Resource Geology in 2004 as 'The Plynlimon Mines ... an integrated evaluation from new surface geological mapping and contemporary subsurface documentation', a paper which showed the nature of the ground being worked from geological mapping allied with the regular captain's reports given in the Mining Journal. Around this time George was able to work out that the mineral rights to the Hafod Estate were still held by the Official Receiver and bought them.

In addition to having unequalled knowledge of the Mining Journal, George spent the greater part of his life fossicking through his own and other archives and retained material in his quite remarkable memory. He also had a phenomenal resource of mining information gained from acquaintance with an older generation of miners.

In 1971, he published his *Metal Mines of Southern Wales*, which is still an invaluable guide to old workings in Glamorgan, Pembroke, Carmarthen and Brecon. He published a second edition in 1993. *Gold Mines of Merioneth* was published in 1975 with, following his professional involvement at Gwynfynydd, an updated edition in 1988.

George was a frequent visitor to the West Country and was involved with various projects there over many years. His *Mines of the Sixties* (2000) was a compilation of selected extracts from the Mining Journal of the 1860s concerning mines of the south-west of England.

In the mid 'noughties' George embarked on a part-time external M.Phil. degree with the history department at Aberystwyth University on the history of the mid-Wales orefield. He continued his research until shortly before his death.

Welsh Mines Society was greatly supported and assisted by George, who hosted regular spring meetings at his Ludlow home. He was a regular authoritative contributor to the WMS newsletter from the very beginning.

George was also particularly fond of jazz – but that's another story.

George's funeral was held in glorious sunshine on Thursday 25th July at Gloucester Crematorium. It was conducted by WMS member the Rev. Roger Shambrook and attended by some 80 or so friends, relations and colleagues, many being WMS members. The proceedings were accompanied by Dave Smith and his jazz band, which really saw George off in style.

George William Hall

1924–2013

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