

# SIR DOUGLAS HALL

Colonial administrator in Africa who later turned his attention to technological innovations

TOWARDS the end of a 30-year career in the Colonial Service, which was spent entirely in Africa, Douglas Hall took a large part in preparing Northern Rhodesia, modern-day Zambia, for independence, and he presided over the independence of the Somaliland Protectorate as its governor in 1959-60. Then, in a long retirement, he gave further service as a justice of the peace and a chairman of local sessions in Devon. In the margin of both careers he developed an expert amateur's interest in the field of wireless communication, making a reputation for himself in the narrow circle of those with similar interests.

Douglas Basil Hall was born in 1909 into a family distinguished by a Scottish baronetcy awarded by James II to an Edinburgh wine merchant forebear in 1687. He was educated at Radley and at Keble College, Oxford, and in 1930 he entered the Colonial Administrative Service. Two years later he was dispatched to Northern Rhodesia, where he was to spend almost all his career.

There, from 1932 to 1959, he steadily climbed the colony's administrative ladder: from cadet to district officer, from senior district officer to provincial commissioner, from administrative secretary to a final appointment as Secretary for Native Affairs to the Government of Northern Rhodesia.

In those years the background of his work slowly shifted. Four phases can be identified. In the years before the war, the pace of development in Northern Rhodesia was slow, even stately, the style of administration complacently paternal. Then the war years placed demands on every territory in the British Empire, the African colonies included, and dictated a more engaged administrative style. In the postwar years came a belated concern for economic development, with

the building of the Kariba dam, for example, which was completed in 1960. And in the 1950s there developed also the movement towards eventual independence for the African colonies, the movement which Harold Macmillan in his speech to the South African Parliament in February 1960 was to call the "wind of change".

Hall associated himself firmly with the advocates of development towards independence. He brought to his work a strong ethical sense of responsibility for the peoples with whose affairs he was entrusted, and he had long years of experience of the people of Northern Rhodesia. By nature a cautious optimist, he saw in black politicians such as Kenneth Kaunda men capable of taking

responsibility for an independent nation. He was a practical man, concerned to get things done, and he identified the movement to independence as something that had to be got done.

He was an imposing figure, 6ft tall but seeming taller, a gentle perfectionist whom others were glad to follow. Like many, but by no means all, colonial officials of his generation, he put his back into working himself out of a job. And when in 1959 he moved to become Governor of the Somaliland Protectorate, it was to supervise the transfer of authority to the newly independent colony and its merger into the new republic of Somalia in the summer of 1960.

That achieved, Hall retired and settled in Devon. He was only 51 and though he



Hall after retiring at the age of 51 he became a respected wireless enthusiast

soon became a justice of the peace and enjoyed tinkering with vintage cars, his time might have lain heavily on his hands. His interest in wireless came to his rescue. In his time in Africa he had undertaken repairs that kept many an expatriate in touch with the BBC and so with the world. In retirement he took matters further and showed himself, in the words of an expert in the field, "an inveterate experimenter with wireless, but no mere tinkerer". Although he was formally quite untrained, he had an almost innate ability to design novel wireless circuits of the most intricate kind.

He specialised in the reflex receiver, whose application comes to the attention of the non-expert in the Identification of the non-expert in the Identification of Friend or Foe equipment of modern air forces. His innovations in this field kept pace with the changes in technology with seemingly effortless ease, and the equipment he created can be seen in the National Wireless Museum on the Isle of Wight. More piquantly, the details of all the circuits he developed are recorded, courtesy of a technology with which Hall in his nineties was unable to make himself familiar, on a website dedicated to "The Ingenious Circuits of Sir Douglas Hall". Told of its existence, he professed himself "tickled pink".

Hall was appointed KCMG in 1959 on his appointment as Governor of Somaliland and in 1978 he succeeded his brother in the baronetcy. In 1933 he married Rachel Marion Gartside-Tipping. They had two sons and two daughters. Lady Hall predeceased him, as did one of his sons. He is succeeded by his son, John, as the 15th baronet.

Sir Douglas Hall, KCMG, civil servant, was born on February 1, 1909. He died on April 8, 2004, aged 95.

Douglas Basil Hall

1<sup>st</sup> February 1909 – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2004

Douglas at 17, on the day he went up to Oxford. There aren't many now who remember the dashing young man with his open car, but he always said he still felt a young man at heart.

Dear Di and Danni

I just would like to say a heartfelt thank you to you and all the many friends and relations, who knew him – at whatever age - during his long life, for such warm, wonderful and comforting letters and cards when he died. I had intended to answer them each personally, but it turned out to be too daunting a task.

The same themes emerge time and time again: his warmth, his modesty, his love of life, of young people, of his family and friends. We were blessed to have him as a father, grandfather and father-in-law and he leaves an enormous gap in the lives of his immediate family. Your letters and support helped so much at the time, and since.

Thank you very much for your letter written after Douglas's death. He so enjoyed his friendship with you, + appreciated the many delicious meals + fun occasions he had spent enjoyed



Only next year we are hoping to come  
down to town for a few days - those ourselves  
at Ella's + see old friends + visit Mum + Dad's place.

With you.

Life has been pretty  
busy since April, hence  
the fact I have only today  
started writing to all those  
many good friends +  
relations, who probably by  
now have assumed they'd  
never hear from me. Life  
has felt quite flat as  
you can imagine but work  
has been busy + some great  
changes are in the air. I  
retire at the end of next  
week + Sara has her baby  
(DV) the week after. So I am  
immediately off to Sydney  
to learn how to be a  
Grandmother! Poor John  
can come as it is - of course -  
from here. With love.  
Dai -

