

## OBITUARY

### Lord Energlyn (1912–1985)

William David Evans, Lord Energlyn of Caerphilly, who died on 27th June 1985 encouraged the development of the East Midlands Geological Society, provided facilities for its meetings and was, until his death, one of the Society's three trustees.

He was a most remarkable man who evoked strong responses in all who knew him personally: distinguished in that he was the only geologist elevated to the peerage this century yet with relatively few scientific publications: he could talk with compelling conviction to politicians about, for example, strategic mineral deposits but fail to convince his colleagues of the soundness of some of his ideas. The paradox, for paradox it was, may be partially explained by the fact that Energlyn worked on the periphery of geology and not inside it; he tackled problems on the interfaces of geology with mining, organic chemistry and with medicine. There he often worked alone: they were fields with plenty of scope for originality and also for mistakes.

He came to Nottingham in 1949, after a short interlude at Cardiff, from a distinguished team of Survey geologists which throughout the war had worked on British Jurassic ironstones and included S.E. Hollingworth and J.H. Taylor who also became University professors. Two important interests came with him. One was Photogrammetry in its application to geology which sprang out of his interest in open-cast mining in South Wales and which he quickly developed into a full subsidiary subject in the Faculty of Science. The other was the relationship between the mineral content and toxicity of mine dusts. He could identify the dangerous properties at a glance but quickly realised that there was a group of mine dusts with potentially toxic properties in areas with a low incidence of miners' pneumoconiosis. This puzzled him and he went on to propose the theory that these anomalous dusts had their dangerous properties counteracted by some therapeutic property of an organic component of the coal. He was to spend many years trying to isolate what he called 'Vitricin' and although as late as 1978 some of his fungicidal extracts were being used in Forestry Commission tests to control Dutch Elm disease, he never felt that he had solved the problem. Throughout the work he had to develop novel techniques and two of these, to which he gave the names 'pyrochromatography' and 'membrane colorimetry', proved very useful in characterising the organic content of rocks in general. He applied them to the Eakring oil-field and showed that the organic geochemical pattern precisely picked out the oil-field structure. In doing so he gave oil-geologists a new prospecting tool. He was a persistent searcher for hydrocarbons in all rocks; he found them in ancient sediments, in a dolerite and even in a meteorite from which he envisaged progressive hydrocarbon degradation accompanying diagenetic and metamorphic changes of more normal type.

Energlyn was full of ideas and in advance of contemporary thought on several issues. For example, he was quite clear about the role of organic components in mineral reactions in sediments when many specialist workers were trying to explain mineral changes in terms of temperature, pressure and inorganic chemical concentrations only. He was also a persistent advocate of the possible exploitation of geothermal energy in Britain at a time when such suggestions were unfashionable: now this idea is receiving considerable attention.

Accompanying his research Energlyn had a continuing interest in the political/strategic aspects of mineral deposits which he referred to as Geopolitics. Largely through this he became an adviser to Harold Wilson and was a member of the delegation which entertained Khrushchev and Bulganin on their visit to London. He was made a life peer in 1968. Thereafter he spent much time at Westminster from where, amongst other work, he was concerned with legislation on the safety of mine tips in the wake of the Aberfan disaster and he and Lord Beesborough conducted a long enquiry into the operation of the Research Associations. He kept in touch with his subject mainly through teaching and through the publication of two books 'Analytical Geochemistry' and 'Through the Crust of the Earth'.

When he came to Nottingham the Geology Department was small and ill-equipped, when he retired it was splendidly housed, well-equipped, fully staffed and thriving. He ran the department with style and unfailing courtliness and gave his staff generous encouragement and support. His students regarded him with affection and some awe and they turned up from all parts and a time span of thirty years from a memorable party to mark his retirement.

R.B. Elliott

(See also *Mercian Geol.* vol. 2, no. 4, 1968).