

The Reverend Doctor Richard Leslie Hills MBE 1936-2019

Richard Hills was born in 1936 in Lewisham in south London. His father Leslie was an Anglican vicar and his mother Margaret (Peggy) was a daughter of Sir John Ontario Miller, Home Secretary to the Governor of India. Peggy died of cancer when Richard was two years old and a year later Leslie was called up to serve as a chaplain in the war. Richard went to live with his Aunt Kathleen in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, and later attended Charterhouse School in Surrey. Whilst there he became interested in engineering and nearly completed a model of Stephenson's Invicta locomotive.

Richard was called up for National Service in 1955 and attained the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery. He went on to read history at Queens' College, Cambridge. There he flirted with various vintage cars, including Alvises which he described as sturdy British bulldogs. He bought a 1924 Lancia Lambda which was 'a rather elegant Italian lady'. Over the next 52 years he rebuilt it, ran it regularly and rallied it. He was an active member of the Mountaineering Society and also the Railway Club through which he was introduced to the narrow gauge lines of North Wales. After graduation he started a Diploma of Education course at Cambridge but his studies were interrupted by a climbing accident. Richard was an instructor for Outward Bound in The Lake District. He was leading a small party of boys on a climb on Needle Ridge on Great Gable when a boulder came loose, crushing his left leg. He nearly lost the leg through gangrene but it was eventually saved. During his year of convalescence he had many skin and bone grafts. In the periods between operations he would stay with Andre and Leslie Kenny at Long Melford where the Lancia was being restored. The Kennys were also helping to restore the 1831 steam engine at Strettham and whilst on a visit there with them Richard came across a trunk full of old records of the engine and the drainage of the fens. He wrote in his autobiography 'They changed my life and my career'. He returned to Cambridge and completed his teaching diploma. He taught at various schools including Worcester College for the Blind. He then had the opportunity to study at Imperial College London and gained a Diploma in the History of Science and Technology through his thesis on fen drainage. This was the basis of the first of his fifteen books.

In 1965 Richard became a Research Assistant in The Department of the History of Science and Technology at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). His research in the textile industry led to his Ph. D. and to his next book *Power in the Industrial Revolution*. Plans were being made by the department for a new museum of science and industry. Richard was appointed Curator and set up The North Western Museum of Science and Industry. The first site was in Grosvenor Street, Manchester. In 1983 The Greater Manchester Development Corporation acquired the site of the first railway passenger station in the world on Liverpool Road and The Museum transferred to this site. He collected mill engines, textile machines, railway locomotives, machine tools and all manner of North West connected artefacts. He described the return of South African Railways Beyer-Garratt steam locomotive No. 2352 as 'perhaps my greatest triumph'. His policy was to have demonstrations of many of the machines actually working. The numerous galleries were bustling with massive engines under steam, mules spinning cotton, looms weaving cloth etc. He made several 16mm films recording the last days of the textile industry in Lancashire. Richard was also involved with Quarry Bank Mill, Nether Alderley Mill and Dunham Massey Mill. At first Richard lived in Oak Cottages on the National Trust estate at Styal but moved to Stamford Cottage, a 17th century weaver's cottage in Mottram in Longdendale, about 10 miles east of Manchester. The original kitchen there was converted into an engineering workshop which contained lathes, a milling machine, a pillar drill etc. The attic housed a large collection of books on theology and the history of engineering, a drawing board, papermaking screens, model steam

engines and his writing desk. Spinning wheels and looms were spread in other rooms throughout the house. A 'lair' was built for the Lancia.

The Manchester Development Corporation appointed an outside Director for The Museum. Richard and his colleagues continued to achieve extraordinary progress in setting up all the machinery. Richard left in 1984 due to overwork. He was then able research several areas of industrial history, including papermaking and windmills. His greatest academic work was his definitive three volume biography of James Watt. He was author of about 150 articles or papers. He continued to teach, lead hillwalking groups, and drive his beloved Lancia.

Richard had always been an active Christian. In 1985 he trained at St Deniol's College, Hawarden, and was ordained as priest. He served in parishes in Urmston (Manchester) and Yarmouth before becoming Curate of Mottram.

In 2005 Richard was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Amongst the many people who helped him through this was Bernice Pickford, a member of the church at Mottram. She had been a food technologist at Hollins School of Catering in Manchester. She was very well known in Girl Guiding circles for her hard work and had been Divisional Commissioner. They got on very well together and were married in 2008. He was 71 and she a few years younger. They travelled a lot and were very happy together. However, Richard had to make concessions. No longer were there steam locomotive models on the kitchen table; a television set appeared in the lounge.

Richard was having problems co-ordinating movements in his legs. Parkinson's disease was confirmed in 2011. They sold Stamford Cottage and moved to a bungalow about a mile away.

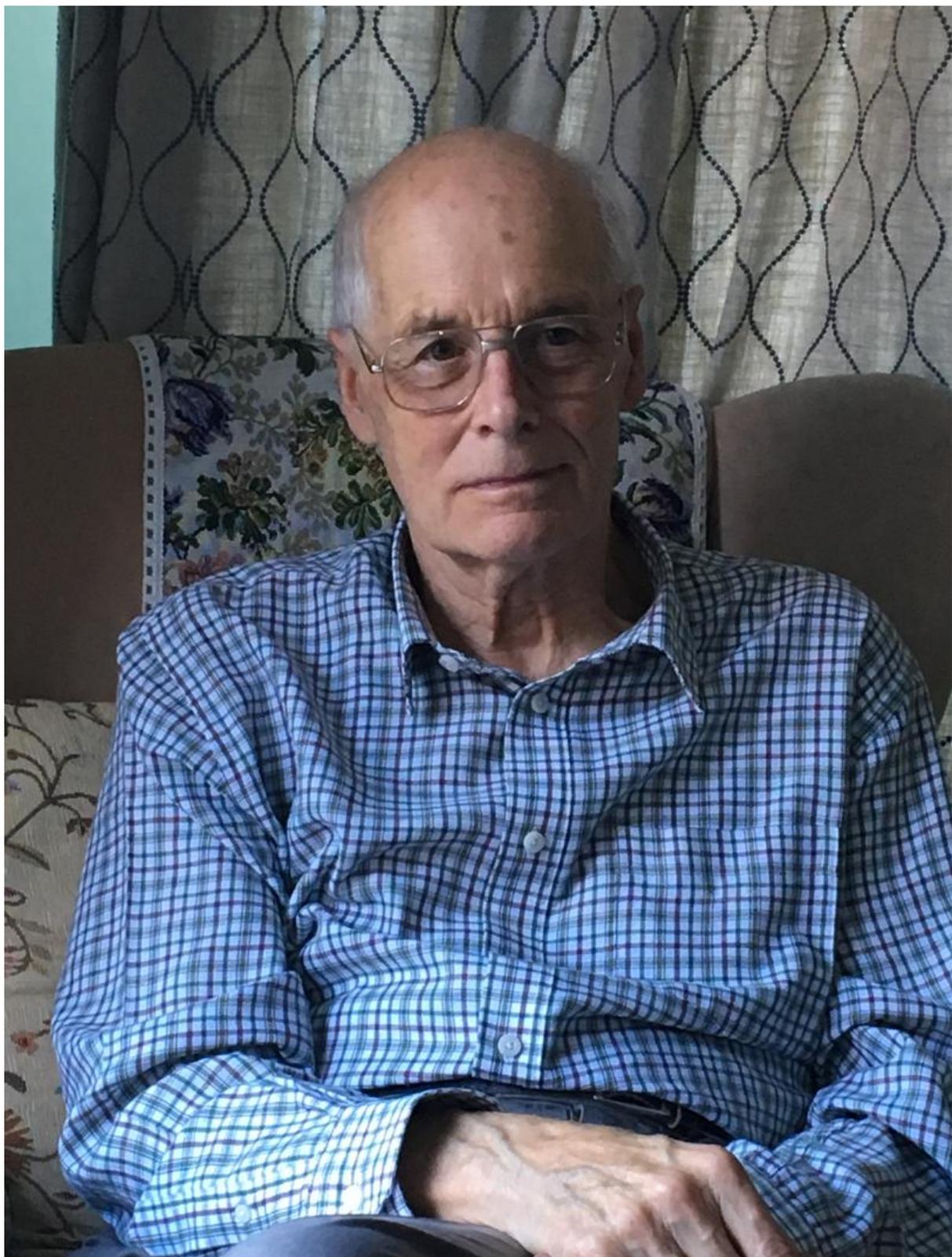
Richard had held many offices, including President of the International Association of Paper Historians, Chairman and Honorary President of British Association of Paper Historians, Chairman of the Manchester Regional Industrial Archaeology Society, Chairman of The Newcomen Society North Western Branch, President of the Manchester Association of Engineers and Warden of the Society of Ordained Scientists. He was made a Companion of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and Honorary Member of several societies. He was awarded the Medal of Honour of the University of Manchester and in 2015 was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire. Sadly Richard was not strong enough to travel to Buckingham Palace. The Investiture was carried out by Warren Smith, Lord-Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, in Mottram Parish Church. This had the benefit that many of his friends could be with Richard on this well-deserved occasion.

Bernice was diagnosed with cancer and in 2016 she died in Willow Wood Hospice in Ashton-under-Lyne.

The Parkinson's disease caused Richard to become frailer and he died peacefully of pneumonia on 10th May 2019 at Willow Wood Hospice.

Richard inspired many people during his life time. He was thorough and meticulous in all he did. He was always helpful and generous with his time. He was always willing to share his knowledge and always gave credit to those who helped him. He leaves behind a sister, a niece, three nephews, two step-daughters, many, many friends and a large literary legacy. Countless people will enjoy and learn from The Museum of Science and Industry for a long time hence.

John Glithero.



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