

Sir Donald Bailey

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By Carl Whiteley



Sir Donald Bailey.

IN the garden of a house in Rotherham, a young Yorkshire lad used to pass away his time making model bridges.

He had enthusiasm and imagination and all he needed to complete his make believe world were a few pieces of wood and bits of string.

Those tiny models were a means of expressing a young creative mind. They were also the seeds of what was to become the greatest military bridge in the world.

Son of a Rotherham secretary and accountant, the boy's name was Donald Bailey.

He was encouraged in his modelling by his father, but little was it realised that at some future date Donald would become famous and receive a knighthood for the invention of a bridge of which Field Marshal Montgomery said: "Without Bailey bridges we should not have won the war".

Sir Donald, who is now the director of M.E.X.E., Christchurch, was educated at Leys School, Cambridge, and continued his studies in Civil Engineering at Sheffield University where he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Engineering.

"After I graduated, jobs were not very easy to get so I went to Rowntree's, of York, the chocolate people, and took a job in the efficiency department on time and motion study. After six months I joined the City of Sheffield engineering department and was engaged on the construction of dams."

From there Sir Donald took a post with the London, Midland and Scottish Railway at which time he was chiefly interested in bridges, docks, harbours and the permanent way.

CHIEF DESIGNER.

He came to Christchurch in 1929 as chief designer at the Bridging Establishment—the forerunner of M.E.X.E.— and was appointed superintendent in 1943.

"The establishment was only small then, and we dealt only with bridges, but as the international situation became worse we increased slightly until the war broke out," recalled Sir Donald.

It was during the early part of the war that the Bailey bridge was designed. "I had worked out a scheme for a bridge about 1936 but it did not receive any great favour as the War Office had then decided on another bridge. I shelved my own design and worked on another.

"When in 1941 the existing bridges were found to be not entirely satisfactory I again put forward my idea of the Bailey bridge and we were asked to go ahead at full speed to complete the design and manufacture of a prototype."

The bridge was demonstrated in May, 1941, and was accepted on the spot.

Original sketch of Sir Donald's all-purpose bridge was scribbled out on the back of an envelope and the whole of the early experimental work was carried out in the drawing office and workshops at the Christchurch establishment.

Sir Donald gave to the Allied armies the finest military bridge in the world and it was not without justification that a British Tommy once said that the three best known names in the Army were: Eisenhower, Montgomery and Bailey.

From the time the fighting forces first started crossing rivers in Italy right up to the crossings of the Rhine and the Elbe in Germany, one of the most important items of equipment was the Bailey bridge.

Sir Donald is a man of the utmost modesty and always seeks to share his achievements with his colleagues at the establishment.

A toast was proposed to him at New Year's Eve celebrations in 1946 after the announcement of his knighthood. He responded: "Thank you very much, but I should like to give you another toast—To the men who put the Bailey bridges up!"

Sir Donald was awarded the O.B.E. in 1943 and in 1947 was made a Commander of the Order of Orange Nassau in recognition of the part that Bailey bridges played in the reconstruction of Holland.

In 1952 he was appointed chairman of a committee set up by Mr. Macmillan, the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, "to consider and report on what action can be taken to increase speed and efficiency in the construction of house interiors".

BAILEY COMMITTEE.

Known as the Bailey Committee, its object was to increase the number of houses completed. There were six distinguished members on the committee which presented its report in 1953.

Sir Donald has made several tours of America and Canada, one of which was at the invitation of the Ontario Hydro Electric Power Commission which made extensive use of the Bailey bridge in the construction of dams.

His academic attainments culminated in his becoming an Hon-Doctor of Engineering of the University of Sheffield and a member of the Council of the Institution of Structural Engineering, a past member of the Council of the Institution of Civil Engineering, hon. member of the Institution of Royal Engineers and a member of the Lord Hives Committee on Technological Education.

FAVOURITE PASTIME.

Golf is one of his favourite pastimes and he was captain of the Highcliffe Golf Club for five years. He is now a trustee of the club and also a trustee of the Red House Museum.

He was married in 1933 at the Priory Church to Miss Phyllis Andrew, formerly of Wick, Southbourne. They lived in Southbourne, during which time he was appointed a magistrate for the Borough of Bournemouth before moving to Twynham Avenue, Christchurch, about seven years ago.

Sir Donald and Lady Bailey have one son, Richard, aged 20, who is studying biology at Cambridge.

A past president and founder-member of the Boscombe and Southbourne Rotary Club, Sir Donald is also chairman of the local A.T.C. Committee.

LIKES DETECTIVE STORIES.

He enjoys light music, reading, particularly detective stories, and television—"when there is something good to be seen".

He dislikes people who appear to know it all. "People," he said, "have always a lot to learn however successful they have been in life, and those with the biggest achievements seem more liable to think that than anyone else."