

## Dr Harold Garnar Reading (1924–2019)



Dr Harold Reading, who died on 13th October 2019 at the age of 95, was a pioneering sedimentologist of international renown, with strong links to the geology of the Pennines. He was a member of the Yorkshire Geological Society for 62 years, only cancelling his subscription in early 2019, when his eyesight failed. He will be best remembered for his ground-breaking textbook ‘Sedimentary Environments and Facies’.

Harold was born in Kent in 1924 and was educated in the Wirral and in Hertfordshire. His formal education was curtailed by the war and, at the age of eighteen, Harold joined the Indian Army, travelling by ship via South Africa and serving in a cavalry regiment in the northwest of pre-partition India until 1947. The experiences of this exciting time had a lasting influence on Harold’s international understanding and perspective.

On returning to post-war Britain, Harold obtained a place at Oxford University to read Forestry, which included an option to take Geology as a subsidiary subject. This course was given mainly by J.V. Harrison, a distinguished structural geologist who had worked extensively in Iran and South America. Harold’s imagination was captured and, at the end of the first year, he switched to full-time Geology. On graduating, Harold was supported by Shell to study for a PhD at Durham University under Kingsley Dunham’s relaxed supervision. This was his introduction to the Pennines where he spent three years mapping Yoredale cyclothems across bleak moorlands of the Stainmore Trough.

On completion of his doctorate, Harold was recruited by Shell and posted to Venezuela. He spent much of the next three years in the field, mapping and logging sections in conditions somewhat different to the North Pennines. During this time, the Shell offices were visited by Philip Keunen, of Groningen University, who had recently published his ground-breaking work on turbidity currents and turbidites. From this encounter Harold realised that careful attention to depositional processes and sedimentary environments could lead to important insights and this established the theme for the rest of his geological career.

On leaving Shell in 1957, Harold was appointed to a lectureship in the Geology Department at Oxford where he remained until retirement. This provided a base from which to develop his sedimentological interests and it was at this time that he joined the Yorkshire Geological Society as, in September 1958 he led a YGS field meeting on the Yoredale successions around Cotherstone, based on his PhD thesis. In Oxford, his stimulating undergraduate teaching triggered the interests of Brian Holdsworth and Ian Chisholm who each went on to make major contributions to Pennine geology. Harold’s own interests spanned North Norway and the Cantabrians as well as the Carboniferous of the Pennines and

southwest England. With Roger Walker and Maurits de Raaf, Harold produced the seminal paper on deltaic cyclothems from the Upper Carboniferous of North Devon which established the principles of facies analysis with which he is most closely associated. These principles provided the methodological and philosophical framework for his expanding stable of post-graduate students including Roger Walker, Trevor Elliott and myself, each of whom advanced understanding of the Pennine Namurian. Others of his 35 doctoral students worked on sediments of different environments and ages from many locations around the world. Harold’s influence is perhaps less well known than it should be because he made a point of not having his name included as an author in the publications of his students, as is the norm today. Several of his doctoral students supervised their own postgraduates who further advanced our understanding of Pennine Carboniferous sediments. Peter McCabe, John Baines, Steve Okolo, Colin Jones, Ole Martinsen, Gary Hampson, Matt Brettle, Colin Percival, Chris Fielding and Chris Reid are all Harold’s scientific grandchildren.

In the mid 1970’s, Harold captured the explosive growth of sedimentological knowledge since around 1960 by pulling together and editing the first edition of ‘Sedimentary Environments and Facies’, where most chapters were written by his former students. This widely read and enormously influential book went through three editions, each involving new writing, often by new authors, with the consequent editorial burden. The third edition was the product of Harold’s ‘retirement’. This widely lauded book must surely be Harold’s lasting legacy.

Harold was honoured by many prestigious awards, with medals from the Geological Society of London, the Society for Economic Paleontology and Mineralogy, the American Association of Petroleum Geologists and the International Association of Sedimentologists of which he was successively Publications Secretary, General Secretary and President. The British Sedimentological Research Group, of which he was a founder member, recently inaugurated the Harold Reading Medal.

The Society has rightly always been very proud of its association with Henry Clifton Sorby, who is widely regarded as the ‘Father of Sedimentology’. It should be equally proud of its association with Harold Reading, who was so instrumental in carrying forward Sorby’s legacy, after sixty years of stasis, to develop the subject of sedimentology as we know it today.

He is survived by his four children and his eleven grandchildren.

**John Collinson**