

ERIC FISHER OF WINSTER An Obituary

Eric Fisher was born in Manchester on the 16th October 1916, and died at Winster on 6th March 1992, aged 75, after several years of poor health due to chest problems. He married Nellie, née Waterfall, of Darley Dale in 1941, and together they had four children, Edward, Gillian, Margaret, and Susan, and he leaves eight grandchildren.

Manchester had been the home of his father, a watch-and-clockmaker. Early misfortune at the age of seven when his mother Hannah née Wild, died, had, in retrospect for Eric, a golden lining, in that he came "back" to live in Winster with Grannie Wild. Her daughter Hannah was sister to Harold (whose photograph is the frontispiece in *Millclose the Mine that Drowned* (Willies, Gregory and Parker 1989), Dennis, and John, all of whom worked at Millclose, and which naturally led, in time, to Eric working there also.

He began work at Millclose at age fourteen, just as it was expanding to cope with the major discoveries of 1929, starting on the picking tables, a photograph shows him at that age with a group of other lads, of various ages, whose job was the dressing of ores. It wasn't long, partly perhaps because of family connections, which was the Millclose way, before he began to get time underground, where he clearly showed a flair for the job beyond the average, gaining experience on a variety of jobs with other, more experienced, men. Four or five years later he was regularly accompanying the mine surveyor, McCall, and occasionally the consultant, Varvill, becoming assistant surveyor, which let him see nearly everywhere in the mine, and which gave him opportunity to pick up further practical skills, and the "nose for ore" that a practical miner needed to develop.

He left Millclose in 1941, at the very end (just before his marriage), and worked with McCall for a time, especially in Wales, where they were involved in assessing a copper prospect. He had tried to "join-up", but was told his was a more valuable reserved occupation. In 1942 he opened Prospect Quarry in the Via Gellia, and worked it until it was sold in 1953. In the meantime he also re-opened the "Enthoven's Portaway", about 1945, of which several photographs survive, though without much success. About 1955, after Enthoven's had given up, Eric re-opened another, "Fisher's Portaway" shaft, some 330 feet deep, and worked that, partially financed by McGregor's of Chesterfield, for a further five or six years. His son, Eddie, in his turn also

aged fourteen, began working underground with his father in 1956, using a cut-down shovel and pick. Eric always believed Portaway would one day relocate the lode lost at the Coast Rake, and for him it was a lead venture, though in fact most production was the more prosaic fluorspar.

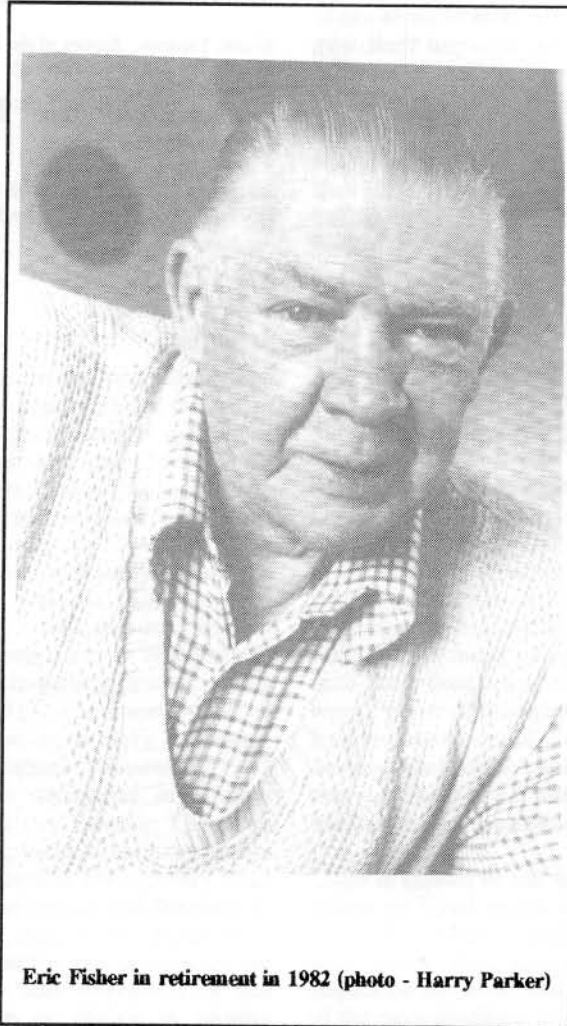
Portaway never did make the big-time, though not for want of effort, and in 1960 he went to work for Laporte at the Sallet Hole Mine, remaining there until retirement due to ill health when he was sixty-three.

Eric Fisher was the last of the independent miners to work for lead via a deep shaft. He was also responsible for exploring over 260 other shafts, and it is not surprising that Nellie Kirkham came to know him well - receiving no doubt some of the hundreds of blue-type-written letters done using two fingers on an ancient machine.

He was generous to the Society - a whole collection of artefacts came to the Museum soon after its foundation, and as the owner of the Portaway Title, which included Wills Founder, he insisted on the Barmoot Court recording its congratulations to the Society in its minutes. For the *Millclose* book, as well as much background information, he gave us the title of one of the chapters, *Five Candles a Shift*, from the book he always wanted, but never came to, write.

Being a Barmoot Juror was to him a great honour - he was a juror for over forty years: his final occasion as a juror was October last year, when for the first ever time, despite the nearness of the dates, it sat on his birthday.

His funeral at Winster was attended by by many of the Barmoot Jurors, and the Barmaster, as well as a large assembly from the village. Appropriately he was buried in the new Winster Churchyard, which is within his Portaway Title, and no doubt he firmly has it in mind that he can still work there so long as it is deeper than fifteen yards from the surface. His life was summed-up by two of his fellow Jurors, Frank Robinson and Jack Beck, with, "There's not many of us left".



Eric Fisher in retirement in 1982 (photo - Harry Parker)