

Passing the torch to future engineers

Vic Hall

Engineer, lecturer

Born: Perth, 1922

Died: Perth, aged 98

Vic Hall was a keen learner for most of his 98 years.

He soaked up educational opportunities like a sponge. In his early years, he aspired. Along the road, he inspired.

Engineering in WA has had few more dedicated carriers of the torch.

WA was his main priority, but he also looked beyond the home horizon. More than half a century ago, Christmas Island was a landing stage in his professional progress.

Appointed by the Federal Government in 1967 to report on the establishment of apprenticeship training facilities, he made thorough recommendations.

The Christmas Island Technical School, established over the following two years, was the result.

Training of Aboriginal adults was another of his achievements. As chair of the establishment committee of Pundulmurra Vocational Training School in South Hedland, he steered the project to fruition. The 1960s saw enormous industrial development in the Pilbara. Vic and other like-minded educators ensured that provision was made to the widest possible range of residents.

Gaining a Fulbright scholarship to attend six months of training at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in 1968, broadened his horizons.

This was a time of huge social challenges in the US, and he was wise enough to notice the winds of change more generally, not just in engineering innovation.

By then, Vic had belonged to Rotary for a decade, underlining the fact that service to others was part of the ethos instilled by his family. In 1965, a change of workplace led to his switch to the West Perth club, where he represented the engineering profession with distinction. He would go on to be an honorary member, the highest status a club can award.

Vic was a classic example of achievement through hard work and determination to cope with adversity. He had begun his apprenticeship in boilermaking/welding in January 1938, just before his 16th birthday, at Saunders and Stuart, a general engineering company in James Street, Perth.

One day, a sliver of metal flew into his left eye, which he could never use again. The accident did not hamper his work and training but did cut short his football career.

At 14, he had represented the State at a tournament in Adelaide in 1936. On the train



trip from Perth, the boys bought boomerangs from Aboriginal traders who gathered at the stops. During a long wait at Port Augusta, some of the young travellers hurled their purchases at seagulls, until the station master suggested they find some other entertainment.

At school and church, Vic won approval of his character and commitment. "He is anxious to get on and I believe he will succeed," wrote the Rev. Harry Reeve, pastor of Perth Baptist Church, in a reference.

Schoolteachers commented on the boy's "steadfast, honest and adaptable" nature. The scoutmaster at Maylands agreed. Vic had evidently been brought up to knuckle down.

Victor Morgan Hall was born in Perth on January 15, 1922, son of Gertrude (nee Wise) and Morgan Hall, a railways storeman, who had married in Katanning. They went on to have a daughter, Joy.

After primary schooling in Mt Lawley, Vic did paid work for a while to boost the family income. He delivered groceries and sold his father's homegrown flowers. Vic eventually studied at the Junior Technical College in Newcastle Street, Perth.

The loss of an eye did thwart his wish to enrol for military service during World War II.

In 1944, the year before peace was restored, he married Joan Davies.

A mechanical drafting diploma was among his formal educational landmarks. His capacity to teach was soon recognised, and WA's technical education system gained a masterful instructor who

combined expertise and energy throughout his professional life.

Wembley Technical College, where he was principal, is one of many places where his calm authority is fondly remembered.

Vic worked his way up the ranks to become assistant director of technical education, before retiring at 60 in 1982.

That left more time for Rotary.

"A remarkable fellow, was Vic," says Geoff Woods, who took over compilation of the West Perth club history after Vic had done it for over 50 years.

"His favourite activity with us was keeping in touch with everyone, listening, guiding and reminiscing. A friendly guy who got on with everyone, regardless of age. He used to come to our annual Rotary weekend at Fairbridge, near Pinjarra."

Vic was West Perth president in 1972-3.

He was the oldest surviving chairman/president of the WA division of the Institution of engineers. After Joan died in 1999, he remained independent in the family home until 2018, when he went to Regis Aged Care in Nedlands.

Vic Hall died on August 20, survived by his daughter, Barbara Jaques, sons, Robert and Owen, 10 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. Another son, Geoff, who followed his father's footsteps into engineering, died in 1986.

Vic covered a lot of ground, socially, professionally and geographically. As a young footballer, he was nowhere near as tall as most other ruckmen, but he had a great leap. Aiming high would sustain him through life. **Patrick Cornish**