

MARSHALL, WALTER CHARLES Baron Marshall of Goring (1932 - 1996), scientist

Name: Walter Charles Marshall
Date of birth: 1932
Date of death: 1996
Spouse: Anne Vivienne Marshall (née Sheppard)
Parent: Amy Marshall
Parent: Frank Marshall
Gender: Male
Occupation: scientist
Area of activity: Science and Mathematics
Author: Lyn Owen

Walter Marshall was born on 5 March 1932 in Rumney, Cardiff, the youngest of three children of Frank Marshall, a baker, and his wife Amy. He showed an early talent for mathematics which was encouraged at St Illtyd's Grammar School, Cardiff. At the age of 11 he developed an interest in chess, and was junior chess champion of Wales by the age of 15.

Marshall left school with a Major County Scholarship and studied mathematical physics at Birmingham University. He acknowledged the great influence on his later development of Professor (later Sir Rudolf) R.E. Peierls. After graduating he remained at Birmingham for research work, and at the age of 22 he gained a PhD for his thesis titled 'Antiferromagnetism and neutron scattering from ferromagnets'. In 1954 he was recruited to join the Theoretical Physics Division at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) at Harwell by fellow Welshman **Brian Flowers** whom he had met while at Birmingham. His early research work related to plasma and to shockwaves. Over his career he became a leading theoretician in the atomic properties of matter, and carried out important research on atomic structures, energy, and the design of nuclear reactors.

In 1955 he married Anne Vivienne Sheppard, whom he had known since childhood. They had two children, a son and daughter.

Marshall was appointed a Head of Division at AERE in 1960, and Director in 1964. He became an enthusiastic supporter of nuclear energy as a source of electricity, and often appeared on the media to support that case. For a period he became Chief Scientist at the UK Government Department for Energy, but was dismissed from the post in 1977 following a disagreement with the Labour Minister for Energy Tony Benn. However, he was supported by the incoming Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, and was appointed Chairman of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in 1981, and Chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board in 1982. There followed a tempestuous period when he became involved in supporting the Government during the miners' strike of 1984-5, and played a role in organising how to keep electricity supplies going. He subsequently became Chairman of National Power, but resigned in 1989 when the nuclear component was not, as he wished, privatised along with other power plants. He then worked for a number of private companies connected with the nuclear industry.

In 1986 a major nuclear incident occurred at Chernobyl in Ukraine. Marshall led the British delegation at a special meeting of the International Atomic Energy Authority to examine the causes and effects of the incident, and it was he who identified the design and operating faults of the reactor. He led a campaign to explain the differences between the design of reactors such as the one in Chernobyl and those in Western nations, aiming to reassure people about the use of nuclear energy. His efforts led to the establishment of the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO) of which he became the first Chairman in 1989. This body has since been involved in supporting safety improvements to nuclear facilities worldwide.

Throughout this period his scientific work was widely recognised. He received the Maxwell Medal from the Institute of Physics in 1964, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1971. In 1973 he was awarded a CBE, and was knighted in 1982. He was made a Freeman of the City of London in 1984 and was awarded an honorary fellowship by St Hugh's College, Oxford. He was awarded a life peerage by the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and became Baron Marshall of Goring in July 1985.

Walter Marshall died of cancer on 20 February 1996 at the Royal Marsden Hospital, Sutton, London, and his funeral was held on 1 March in St Andrew's Church, South Stoke, Goring in Oxfordshire.

Author

Lyn Owen

Sources

Who was who?

L. E. J. Roberts, 'Marshall, Walter Charles, Baron Marshall of Goring', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
Obituary in *The Independent*, 26 February 1996

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Walter Marshall, Baron Marshall of Goring](#)

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