

## **The Guardian Wednesday November 19 1997**

### **Obituaries**

#### **Richard Hall, Journalist, Born July 22, 1925, Died November 14, 1997**

##### **Tough Love For Africa**

RICHARD HALL, who has died aged 72, was an inspiration for more than 40 years to many Africans and non-Africans who worked in, and for, Africa. He was a writer, editor, commentator, historian and humanist - with a capacity to recognise cultural realities other than his own.

From his days as a Daily Mail trainee in the late 1940s, to his time in Zambia as the pioneer editor of papers aimed at an African readership, to his majestic history of the Indian Ocean, all his work reflected this gift.

Born in Margate he spent his early boyhood in Australia. But it was only after Hastings Grammar School, wartime Royal Navy service as decoder on a destroyer, an Oxford degree and the period on the Daily Mail that he found his vocation in Africa. In 1953, married to his first wife Barbara, and with four children. Hall was offered the editorship of two Zambian Copperbelt in-house magazines, one targeted at affluent white miners, and the other at a low-income but increasingly skilled black readership. This was in a British colony in which to purchase meat. African miners and others lead to queue at a hatch labelled "dogs and boys".

Recognition of the emergence of a different northern Rhodesia - which nationalists were already calling Zambia - was subsequently reinforced when Hall became managing editor of a set. of government-owned papers written in more than 10 languages. This brought him into closer contact with the diversity of rural Zambia. and his recognition of a new class of educated English-speaking Zambians led him to co-found the African Mail with Dr Alexander Scott. Financially backed by the Observer's David Astor, the new paper argued for the end of the white-dominated Central African Federation, and a move towards independence.

The paper's success in building a 30,000 weekly circulation stemmed from its ability to communicate with the new urban Zambian class epitomised in Barbara Hall's "Tell me Josephine" column, where young Zambians sought advice on new social problems. Its legacy was a cadre of trained journalists who have subsequently dominated the Zambian media.

With independence in 1964, Hall accepted Tiny Rowland's offer to edit Lonrho's Times of Zambia - but not before writing his History of Zambia, which placed the new nation in the context of 2,000 years of pre-colonial history. Hall had taken Zambian citizenship at independence to avoid criticism that his critique of the new government was that of an uncommitted expatriate. But post-independence politics led him to recognise that he could best assist liberation in the remainder of southern Africa from London. Parting amicably from Zambian leader - and long-time friend -- Kenneth Kaunda, he published from London a series of briefing notes on behalf of the Zambian government, on Zambian development and on the costs of Southern Rhodesia's white rebel government's unilateral declaration of independence to the rest of southern Africa.

The latter culminated in *The High Price of Principles - Kaunda and the White South* (1969). Supporting the case which Kaunda and Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere had made for a new rail-link between the Copperbelt and the Indian Ocean, Hall later wrote *The Great Uhuru Railway* about the colossal achievement of the building of the Tazara railway in four years by the Chinese.

In the 1970s he combined the writing of biographies of the explorers of Africa, Henry Stanley and Samuel Baker, with, first., editing the *Observer* magazine; second, coverage of international and domestic news for the *Financial Times*; and third, the position of the *Observer's* Commonwealth correspondent.

In his African studies, Hall captured with colour and verve the atmosphere of mid - Victorian Africa. These were eventually followed by *Empires of the Monsoon* (1996). an ambitious history of successive powers' attempts to dominate the Indian Ocean. Hall reconstructed the struggle for a space not normally regarded as a consistent whole, and was thus true to his conviction of the need for alternative history. This also reflected in his work with Japan's *Asahi Shinbum* to recording a television history of the British Empire. In each of these ventures he was greatly assisted by his second wife, Carol Cattley, who he met on the *Observer*.

Hall's last year at the *Observer* in 1984 was dominated by a quarrel with the then editor, Donald Treford, and the then proprietor, Tiny Rowland. The disagreement focused on the *Observer's* coverage of post-independence events in those African countries Hall knew so well, but in which Lonrho had lucrative investments. The tensions arising from these differences were documented in *My Life with Tiny* (1987).

After his resignation from the *Observer*, Hall, aged 61, founded the highly respected fortnightly *Africa Analysis*, remaining active as its publisher and as a contributor until his death. Through its columns he constantly questioned the orthodoxies of governments and development agencies - and reflected his never-tiring enthusiasm for hard news.

Hall was tough but tender. There was toughness in the education of his five sons, sending one of them from Zambia, aged 12, to study French under the eye of Katangese gendarmes; with himself, as a former RN champion runner, in running five miles a week in his seventies; as a journalist, in that he was the last to leave defeated Biafra; and as a historian in taking a stormy passage by dhow in 1992 from Mombasa to Zanzibar.

On the other hand he empathised with the dispossessed and the ostracised. It was appreciated as much by South African refugees who used his Lusaka house as a staging post, as by the latter day victims of the excesses of post-independence governments from Mashonaland to the Ogoni Delta. He leaves a wife Carol, and five sons by his first marriage to Barbara Hall.

**Laurence Cockcroft**