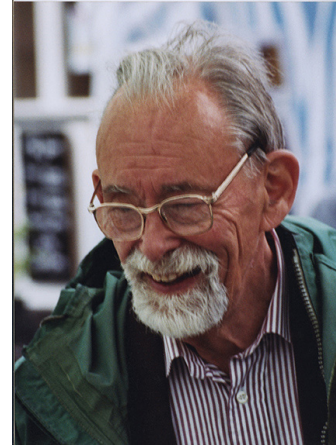


GEORGE SPENCELEY (1911–2013)

George was born in Harrogate, a proud Yorkshireman. At school he disdained organised games, preferring the lone pursuit of cross-country running in his beloved Dales.



When war broke out in 1939 he volunteered for the Royal Air Force, becoming a pilot in Bomber Command, flying on 40 missions, many in the Middle East. Back in Britain in 1942 he became an instructor. Standing in at the last minute to fly as rear gunner in a Wellington bomber (how did he fold himself into the gun turret?), he flew on the second thousand bomber raid over Cologne and the Ruhr. This mission, voluntarily flown, proved to be his last. The Wellington was shot down, all the crew perishing except George who miraculously parachuted to safety. Unconscious for 10 days, he woke up in a hospital staffed by white-robed nuns. George used to say he thought he was in heaven.

Not for long, alas, as he was soon moved to the infamous 'Great Escape' Stalag Luft III. Later, with the Russians advancing from the east he was forced into the Winter Long March to the west in early 1945, narrowly missing death a few days before the European war ended, when his column of prisoners came under 'friendly fire' from RAF Typhoons. Frail from the march, George at last joined with British troops for urgently needed medical aid and eventual return to England.

Despite his wartime experiences, George's quest for adventure didn't desert him. He combined teaching geography with climbing in the Lake District where he lived with his first wife Marjorie, with whom he had his three sons, Julian, Adrian and Nicholas. There were summer expeditions to the Alps, which led to his acceptance as a member of the South Georgia Survey 1955–56. It falls to few of us to have a glacier named after us, but the Spenceley Glacier is a lasting testimonial to George's contribution to the Survey's work.

After his return, George had a near escape when, on an expedition to the Jugal Himal in Nepal, he was the sole survivor of a party overwhelmed by an ice avalanche. George continued his climbing and, together with his experience and fine personal photographic collection, came another career as a lecturer. He spoke at schools, colleges and institutions and was always assured of a rapt and attentive audience.

Yet another outlet for George's inexhaustible energy was canoeing. He undertook a six-week journey through northern Canada and, with his devoted second wife, Sylvie, who he married in 1977, full length trips of the Danube and Mississippi rivers.

George and Sylvie came to live in Steeple Aston, subsequently moving to Deddington where he became a familiar figure running and jogging on his morning outings. Finally he was a popular member of that absurdly-named institution 'Gardeners' Question Time' where, as throughout our community, he is sorely missed. Farewell George.

John Cheney