

## ELLIOT, Sir GEORGE (1815 - 1893), BARONET, owner and developer of coalmines

**Name:** George Elliot  
**Date of birth:** 1815  
**Date of death:** 1893  
**Spouse:** Margaret Elliot (née Green)  
**Child:** George William Elliot  
**Parent:** Elizabeth Elliot (née Braithwaite)  
**Parent:** Ralph Elliot  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** BARONET, owner and developer of coalmines  
**Area of activity:** Business and Industry; Royalty and Society  
**Author:** David Leslie Davies

Born at Penshaw, Gateshead, co. Durham, in March or June 1815, one of the six children of Ralph Elliot, under-manager of Whitefield colliery and his wife Elizabeth (née Braithwaite). At the age of 9 he began working 14 hours a day underground. When he was 19 years old he went as a promising trainee to the office of Thomas Sopwith, underground inspector at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, returning to Whitefield within six months and becoming an overman. In 1837 he was made under-manager of the Monkswearmouth colliery, Sunderland - the deepest pit in England at the time - and manager in 1839.

In 1840 he bought, in partnership, Washington mine, and in 1843 he bought his first pit on his own at Usworth, and at Whitefield in 1864. He was appointed in 1851 chief consultant and engineer in the Marquis of Londonderry's mines in the Durham coal field. After resigning c. 1860 he bought Kuper & Co., Gateshead, makers of industrial wires which had almost become bankrupt in 1849. He went into partnership with Richard Glass, the inventor of submarine wire insulation, to recreate the company as Glass & Elliot, or from 1864 the Telegraph Construction & Maintenance Co., the company which made the first submarine wires between Europe and America (1866), and between India and Australia.

This is when he ventured into the coalfields of south Wales. He was responsible in 1864 for forming the partnership of Englishmen and Scotsmen who bought for £365,000 all the coal mines of the late **Thomas Powell** of 'Y Gaer', Newport, Monmouth, from his sons, and established the Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Co. which grew to be the largest coal company in south Wales before it was nationalised in 1947. About 16 pits in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire belonging to the Powell family came into the hands of the new company, and Elliot lost no opportunity in extending the business and buying coalmines near Aberdare. By buying the rich coalmine and ironworks of **Crawshay Bailey** in that neighbourhood, Powell Duffryn seized the nucleus of the old estate of the **Mathews** of Aberaman, a branch of the ancient family of Radyr and Llandaff, and gentry of the district before becoming extinct in 1788. There, in their mansion (which had been renovated extensively by a previous purchaser, **Anthony Bacon, II**), Elliot lived at intervals; and there, after his day, Powell Duffryn made their headquarters.

Powell Duffryn proceeded under the leadership of Elliot and his successors to secure more coalmines in the Aberdare valley and other mines in the Rhymney valley. The company also developed railways in the Aberdare and Rhymney valleys to promote exports, and the coke, electricity and gas works. In 1920 P.D. gained ownership of the old Rhymney Iron Company and its extensive estate, and the company bought thousands of acres in the Llantrisant area. The company's foreign business was so vast by 1914 that a branch was established in Europe, Compagnie Française des Mines Powell Duffryn. This growth stemmed from Elliot's foresight and energy. He was acting manager of the company, 1864-77 and 1880-88; and chairman, 1886-89. Elliotstown, Rhymney valley, was named after him, and also streets in his and his wife's memory in Aberaman. In memory of his wife he paid for a new church there in 1882-83, and endowed a new church in Whitby, Durham, in 1886.

However, he was not free from opposition. The trustees of the **Marquis of Bute** were reluctant to grant him everything he sought, so he took an interest in the development of Newport docks to avoid Cardiff, over which they had a hold. He was the chief promoter of the Alexandra northern dock in Newport which was opened in 1875 and which gave a foundation for the subsequent growth of the town; he obtained parliamentary authority to lay the Pontypridd, Caerphilly & Newport Railway, 1878-83, to serve him in exporting coal. He was enthusiastic about the future of the coal industry to the last. Three months before his death he published a plan for a trust to hold all the resources of the industry in Britain, with the owners holding shares but sharing the profits with the workers and an insurance fund.

Elliot was also a prominent public figure. He was M.P. (C) for Durham North, 1868-80 and 1881-85; and for Monmouth, 1886-92. He was a Tory much to Disraeli's liking and was made a baronet in 1874 for services to his party and for his 'useful life'. Both of them shared an interest in Egypt. Elliot was there in 1874 and 1875-76 planning railways and as a financial advisor to the insecure government of the Khedive. In 1878 he went officially to inspect the island of Cyprus after Turkey had yielded it to Britain. He was Deputy Lieutenant for the counties of Durham and Monmouth and a J.P. for Durham, Monmouth and Glamorgan. In 1882 he received an hon. D.C.L. of the University of Durham, and he was president of the Association of Mining Engineers. He sponsored educational establishments and the Anglican church in the north of England and south Wales, and he was a prominent figure among the Freemasons. The Prince of Wales appointed him Provincial Grand Master of the Eastern Lodge of South Wales in Aberdare in 1877.

In 1836 he married Margaret Green (died 1880) of Rainton, Houghton-le-Spring, Durham. He died 23 December 1893, and was buried in Houghton churchyard. They had two sons and four daughters.

Sir George Elliot was succeeded to the baronetcy by his second son, Sir George William Elliot, in 1893 (his first son had died in 1874) and he too was a M.P. (C), 1874-95, when he died. The title then passed to his son, Sir George Elliot, the third baronet, and in 1904 to the latter's brother, Sir Charles Elliot. The title became extinct at the death of the fourth baronet in 1911.

Three particularly significant aspects may be perceived in Elliot's career. First, by rising from the lower ranks of society to its peak through his own endeavours he represents quite strikingly the energy and confidence of the Victorian Age in the industrial field. Second, he played an especially important role in the development of the south Wales coalfield, exemplifying the change which occurred as groups of English capitalists bought the companies and coalmines from several venturesome native Welshmen who had preceded them. Third, his political career as a self-made man was an excellent example of the new Tory Party which Disraeli wanted to create. It was Elliot who was chiefly responsible for reducing the hours of work of an underground worker from 12 to 9 hours a day, and he was an important intermediary between the masters and workers during the great strike of 1871 in south Wales. In 1874 he maintained that he had devoted a great part of his life to the welfare of the working class; yet, he did not wish to be seen as a M.P. for that class - 'since there were other interests to be represented'.

### Author

David Leslie Davies

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Sir George Elliot, 1st Baronet](#)

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