



Alfred Brian Hawkins

PhD, DSc, FICE, FIMMM, FIHT,

CEng, CGeol, EurIng. 10 October 1934 to 22 January 2016

Like many of my colleagues, I first met Brian when I was a new geology undergraduate at the University of Bristol when he led a fieldtrip to the Lake District, in 1975.

Originally a geographer, his interest in the Quaternary had led him to geology and then by default to the then fairly young discipline of engineering geology, because people were approaching the university for advice. He was appointed Reader in Engineering Geology in 1979.

He was one of those lecturers who inspired students with his subject and one who was popular with the student community. After my graduation he invited me to partake of a NERC sponsored PhD project on superficial structures and slopes in the south Cotswolds, near Bath, England. It was during this time that I got to know Brian better, and his later to be business partner, Marian Trott.

He was one of only two people not in my family to know that I was getting married. It was going to be a secret but whilst out doing some consultancy in my field area a date was suggested for the next meeting. I explained I could not make it that day. The response was along the lines of ‘you’re a student, what could you possibly be doing on that day that would prevent you from attending?’ Rather embarrassed, I replied “I am getting married”. He even bought me a wedding present!

I attended three more Lake District trips, this time as a postgraduate demonstrator and witnessed Brian’s inimitable style of picking on someone (in a nice way) to explain what the exposure was telling us. He always took the same coach driver who came out with us into the field. Unbeknown to one poor student who did not know the answer, Brian asked “Surely you don’t want the coach driver to explain it to you?” The coach driver (Kelvin) strode forward confidently and casually explained how the joints in the igneous rock had been formed as the rock had cooled, much to the chagrin of the poor student. He lived to fight another day.

I was one of his early postgraduates and subsequently Brian supervised a long line of PhD students (more than 35). He established a strong engineering geological research unit embracing topics in slope stability in engineering soils and engineering rocks; the development of ground sulfates and the stability and remediation of mines and tunnels. He published extensively (over 70 papers) and was awarded a Doctor of Science degree for this work.

He spawned a cottage industry, with six of his former postgraduate students working at one time for one company in Bristol (Hydrock), including the managing director.

All of us were inspired to become engineering geologists by Brian and to make it our life’s work. We owe him a great deal and are truly grateful. He certainly taught me a great deal of what I know and, more importantly, how to apply it and how to communicate it. It was Brian who persuaded me

to join the Engineering Group committee and the QJEGH Editorial Board, both of which I enjoyed and doubt I if would have been involved without his mentoring.

A surprise dinner was organised in 2006, in cahoots with Marian who ostensibly took Brian out for a meal for two. 'By coincidence', various groups of 4 or 5 former PhD students arrived in quick succession, all apparently having booked tables in the same restaurant on the same night. Of course, Brian guessed what was happening by the time the second group arrived. The waiters pushed the tables together and a good time was had by all, reminiscing about the good times. Impromptu speeches were exchanged. Brian was in his element.

Brian took early retirement from the university to concentrate on his consultancy but continued to lecture civil engineering and geology undergraduates. He ran a small practice so as to remain involved on a personal level, advising local authorities, public utilities, contractors and consultants on practical aspects of construction work as well as contractual issues and as an expert witness.

Over more than 40 years he worked as an academic and practical engineering geologist, both in the UK and abroad.

He was frequently invited to lecture at universities and international conferences and to be involved in field visits and has always been active in the profession. Amongst his many roles have been: Secretary (1974 to 1976) and then Chair (1982 to 1984) of the Engineering Group of the Geological Society; Vice President for Europe for the International Association for Engineering Geology and the Environment (IAEG) (1995 to 1998); member of the Geotechnique Advisory Panel; Editor of the Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology (1990 to 1993) and Editor-in-Chief of the Bulletin of Engineering Geology and the Environment (for 15 years from 1998 to 2012, ably assisted by Marian). His one disappointment was not being elected as President of the IAEG in 1998. After the first vote, the two leading candidates had received the same number of votes. On the second vote the same thing happened. It was not until the third vote that Professor Wang Sijing was narrowly elected.

Brian was honoured with being the first recipient of the Marcel Arnould Medal presented at the 2014 IAEG Congress in Torino "in recognition of people of significant repute within the IAEG and who have made a major contribution to the Association".

I close with some anonymised comments I have received from well-wishers, former colleagues and students of Brian.

"Amazing, irritating, loveable rogue, mentor, troublemaker, once met never forgotten (especially if you sat near the front). Listened to him giving an outrageous performance at a lecture last year, and still remember the very first fieldtrip with him."

"He had a huge impact on my life and I remember my first field trip with him. I suppose it comes to us all but what a way to go, doing the thing that you love doing and doing right to the last."

"It is amazing to think of how much I owe to Brian's influence, guidance and encouragement during those formative (undergraduate and postgraduate) years as an emerging engineering geologist."

“One thing struck me was that he never forgot his postgraduate students; he was always full of praise for us no matter how “miserable” (his words) we turned out; he really cared and valued his time as a supervisor and was very proud of his small army of postgraduates.”

“He really was special and an inspiration.”

“He seemed indestructible and only saw him a couple of months ago when he was on his usual form.”

“An engineering geologist with prominence, a colleague with a large presence in the development of our learned society [IAEG] and with a great contribution in making our journal prestigious in our field.”

“It’s a pleasure to have known him throughout my career.”

“He was a vivid character ... great generosity of character, unconventional approach to teaching, and incredibly broad knowledge and experience.”

“Brian has left a wide-spread legacy in the many students that he taught and enthused over the years and through his work within our profession.”

“Brian was one of the greats and it was a privilege to have known him.”

Kevin Privett, February 2016

Brian Hawkins receiving the Marcel Arnould Medal of the IAEG in 2014 in Torino at the 12th International Congress.

Brian Hawkins in a gull, doing what he will be most remembered for.