

OBITUARY

Professor Michael Dickson

CBE, BA, MS, CEng, FEng, FStructE, FICE, Hon FRIBA, FRSA

Michael Dickson, Past President of the Institution, passed away on Monday 28 May 2018 after a battle with cancer. An inspirational man in so many ways, he was one of the great leaders, thinkers and mentors in our profession.

Michael studied Mechanical Sciences at the University of Cambridge, and Structural Engineering at Cornell University, USA. His time at Cornell introduced him to Peter Rice, who lured him back to Ove Arup and Partners, where he worked with, among others, Sir Ted Happold. In 1976, Ted was joined by Michael and six others in setting up BuroHappold Engineering in Bath.

Michael rose to be Chairman of BuroHappold from 1996 to 2005. From its modest beginnings, today the firm has 14 offices in seven countries and employs over 1400 staff. This expansion included a five-fold increase in size during Michael's chairmanship, a graphic illustration of his leadership abilities. However, it was Michael's exceptional design ability which so many people across the world still see daily in his artefacts. This ability was based on an holistic outlook of producing a beautiful built environment. Nowhere is this illustrated better than in the many wide-span enclosures which he designed with Frei Otto. Michael would travel to Stuttgart to see Frei in the early days of BuroHappold, and such interaction, which included Ian Liddell, Ted Happold and Mike Barnes, led to splendid designs, including the Mannheim and Munich Aviary enclosures.

To provide a flavour of Michael's subsequent leadership of BuroHappold in terms of internationally recognised design prowess, examples of projects in which Michael had influence include the Emirates Stadium, Ascot Racecourse, the Millennium Dome, the Weald and Downland Museum Gridshell, The Savill Building in Windsor Great Park and the Great Court Roof in the British Museum.

Michael's leadership in the field of engineering did not stop at BuroHappold. Michael was Chair of the Construction Industry Council, Chair of the New Construction Research and Innovation Strategy Panel and, of course, President of The Institution of Structural Engineers. He chaired the Institution's Task Group on 'Building for a sustainable future – construction without depletion' many years before our politicians heeded the call for sustainability to be a mainstream part of life. Given that construction is the UK's single largest industry, worth 10% (£100bn) of GDP, the introduction of this philosophy into design consultancy across the UK was a crucial step.

But it was Michael's desire to see his experience of structural and architectural engineering passed on to the next generation which will endure

as one of his greatest legacies. He was a tremendous role model for the younger generation – full of life, enthusiasm, optimism, creativity and can-do attitude. By placing sustainability at the heart of engineering decisions, he was able to excite the next generation of Michael Dicksons through tutoring them in the technical and artistic attributes of building design.

Michael's involvement with the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Bath stretched back to 1976, and he was still regularly tutoring students on interdisciplinary design projects right up until 2014, as Visiting Professor and as the holder of an Honorary Doctorate in Engineering from the University. Michael also encouraged his colleagues to tutor students, a culture which continues to thrive, to the exceptional benefit of the students and, equally importantly, to the tutors too.

Another example of Michael's commitment to education was his strong involvement in The Happold Foundation, which has as its altruistic aim to inspire younger engineers to dream a bit, and thereby to help to change the world for the better.

One of the courses which Michael lectured was 'Architectural Structures', which took students through the extraordinary history of some of the world's greatest structures. Michael and Professor Pete Walker had been co-authoring a book entitled *Structural Materials for Sustainable Architecture*, which collates this depth of knowledge to the benefit of all. It is nearly complete, and Pete is determined that this book will be published as a tremendous legacy of, and fitting tribute to, Michael.

Michael leaves behind his wife, Effie, and his two daughters, Amy and Sarah, to whom the Institution extends its most sincere condolences. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.



Michael Dickson CBE
22 September 1944–28 May 2018