

Obituary

Keith White, 1933–2022

BSc(Eng), FEng, FStructE, FCIHT, FICE

KEITH CHRISTOPHER WHITE, WHO SERVED

as President of the Institution of Structural Engineers in 1987–88, has died at the age of 89.

Keith had a long involvement with the Institution, serving on Council from 1973–79, first as an elected member for a three-year term then as a co-opted member while Chairman of the Education & Examinations Committee. In 1981, he was co-opted to Council again as Chairman of the Associate-Membership Committee, before serving as a Vice-President from 1983–87.

Keith became a Fellow of the Institution in 1969, later also being elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering in 1989.

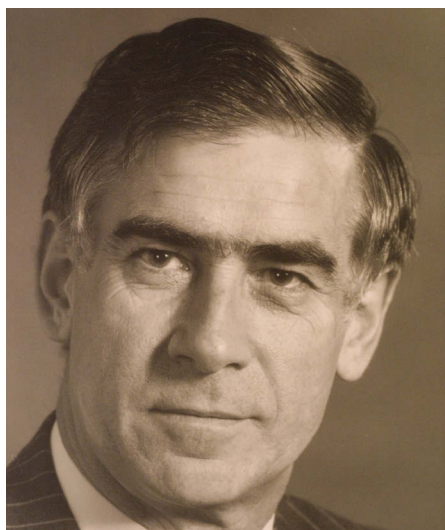
Born in Carshalton, Surrey, in 1933, Keith was educated at Glyn Grammar School, Epsom. On leaving school in 1949 at the age of 16, Keith secured a trainee position at R. Travers Morgan & Partners, then a small firm of structural engineers based in London, following an interview with senior partner L. Scott White, who was also President of the Institution.

Keith trained under George Kirkland (later to become President of the Institution in 1960) at Travers Morgan, initially studying at Brixton School of Building on a day-release course designed to lead directly to the Institution's Part 3 examination. However, realising that his sights were not set high enough, he switched to Northampton Polytechnic, London (eventually to become City University). On completing his A-levels, he followed straight on to a degree course in civil engineering, again on day release, at the University of London.

After graduating, Keith was required to complete his national service, training as an infantryman with the Royal Norfolk Regiment, before transferring to the Royal Engineers at Mons. Accepted for a commission, he completed training at Chatham before a posting to Malaya towards the end of the emergency.

Returning to the UK in 1960, Keith up took the position of Assistant Resident Engineer for the Thames crossing of Donnington Bridge and Roadworks for the City of Oxford. During a two-year period, he obtained corporate membership of the Institutions of Structural, Civil and Highway Engineers.

Keith subsequently worked on a variety of projects with Travers Morgan, including the Johnson & Johnson headquarters building at Slough, which won a Concrete Society Award in 1982, the Spinal Injuries Unit at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, and the London North West District



Sorting Office for the Post Office.

In 1971, Keith became a partner at Travers Morgan, remaining so until the firm's amalgamation first as part of the Symonds Group and then, in the early 1990s, as part of Capita. He was Chairman of Travers Morgan Ltd from 1991 until his retirement in 1993.

Former colleagues recall Keith as being firm but fair. As well as being the boss, he would take a keen interest in what the graduates and younger engineers were doing. In fact, at least two long-serving members of staff were recruited directly from a school where Keith's father was deputy headmaster. He also continued a partnership ethos of supporting the Institution and encouraging others to do so. Several engineers with their roots in Travers Morgan went on to become presidents of the Institution.

Keith was very forgiving of mistakes provided that they were taken seriously and used as learning opportunities. On one occasion, an electric overhead travelling crane designed by a young and recently chartered engineer failed its certification test! The engineer was told to sort out the matter, explain to the client what was going to happen and who was going to pay to put it right. Keith and the other structural partners took the view that a few sleepless nights would do the miscreant no harm and provide a long-remembered lesson.

Another recollection was of a site visit where Keith accompanied one of the engineers to look at the excavation of foundations. 'Ah,' said Keith,

'good crunchy ballast. I wish that all foundations were like that!'

There were acts of family kindness as well. Travers Morgan had an established office in Oman. One of the resident engineers was there with his family and one day one of their children cut her foot on some glass. Keith happened to be visiting and staying in the same place and immediately took the child to hospital.

Keith could also be prone mild administrative oversights. On one occasion, he and the then senior partner travelled with one of the engineers to advise on an earthquake issue in the Mediterranean area. A hotel was booked but, although the senior partner arrived at the correct hotel, Keith and the other engineer mistakenly went to a different one. Unfortunately, only one room was available, so a sofa had to be brought into action!

Keith played an active role in the industry, becoming a founder member of the Building Industry Council, later widened to become the Construction Industry Council, of which he was Deputy Chairman in 1991–93.

He also served on the joint IStructE/Concrete Society committees writing the reports on 'Falsework' (1971) and 'Formwork' (1977), and then was a member of the code drafting committee for BS 5975:1982 *Falsework*, as well as serving on the committee drafting the Institution's report *Communication of structural design* (1974) and chaired the committees drafting reports on *Stability of buildings* and *Design of masonry structures*.

Following his national service, Keith maintained an interest in military engineering and was a Major in the Engineer & Transport Staff Corps, Royal Engineers; he was also a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Pavors.

His career involved many hospital buildings, and it gave him particular pleasure when, in 1982, he was invited by the Secretary of State for Wales to join the Board of the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation, specifically to introduce at Board level a member with knowledge of the construction industry.

Away from work, Keith enjoyed cricket – being a keen MCC supporter – reading, walking, swimming, golf and watercolour painting. Together with his wife, Jenny, they had three children: Paul, Gill and Judy. Keith is survived by Jenny, Gill and Judy.