George Geoffrey Meyerhof

Geoff Meyerhof was a distinguished geotechnical engineer, best known for his work on the bearing capacity of foundations. He died aged 86 on 2 January 2003 in the QE II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. His father was Professor Otto Meyerhof, a Nobel Laureate in Physiology. He was born on 29 May 1916 in Kiel and came to England for his college education. He graduated with a BSc in Civil Engineering from University College, London in 1938 and was for a time a structural engineer with Ove Arup, where he obtained his PhD. He was with Harry Stanger in his testing laboratory at Elstree before he joined the Building Research Station in 1946 where, with his assistant Theodore Chaplin, he carried out extensive research into the behaviour of foundations. London University awarded him the degree of DSc, and in 1953 he moved to Canada to join the Foundation Engineering Company of Canada. He became Head of the Civil Engineering Department then Dean of Engineering at the Technical University of Nova Scotia.

He was author of more than 200 papers, a book of selected papers on structural and soil mechanics subjects and a booklet 'Memories of a Civil Engineer in World War II'. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering. In 1999 he was appointed a member of the Order of Canada for distinguished services in geotechnical engineering and in 2000 was awarded Honorary Fellowship of the Institution of Civil Engineers for his world-renowned contribution to geotechnical engineering. He was recipient of the R.F. Legget Award of the Canadian Geotechnical Society and the Karl Terzaghi Award of the American Society of Civil Engineers, for his

outstanding contribution to foundation engineering. In addition he was awarded honorary degrees by universities in Aachen and Ghent.

Geoff's particular genius was in never forgetting that his work as a research engineer had to be capable of being applied by practising engineers. He always strove to find simple solutions to inherently complex problems of soil behaviour, and in his papers and lectures he felt bound to resolve problems, not just restate them. Thus much of his scholarship was concealed so that his conclusions would stand out. As one of his colleagues recalled, when he was preparing his Terzaghi Lecture, each point meticulously plotted on his graphs was the result of thorough scrutiny of much information.

Among his many accomplishments and honours, two in particular mark his place among his Canadian colleagues. In the early 1970's, the Canadian soil mechanics community was coming of age, and decided to establish its own learned society. As the founding members considered who should be their first president, there was no contest once the name Meyerhof was suggested. Thus he became the first President of the Canadian Geotechnical Society. Later, the society established the annual Geoffrey Meyerhof Award, for an outstanding contribution to the profession by one of its members. Both these actions reflected their sincere respect and affection.

His first wife Elisabeth died some years ago and he is survived by his second wife Ingrid, and two sons Thomas and Peter. He will be missed by many colleagues in geotechnical engineering.

—Arthur Penman and John Brown