

GRAHAM HARRIS (1937–2014)

By H.L. (Les) MacPhie and Fred Matich



Graham Harris, an engineer with broad experience in the practical application of geotechnical engineering to large projects, died suddenly in Bedeque, Prince Edward Island, on July 9, 2014 aged 77. His long career in his chosen field was complemented by significant achievements as a historian and author.

Graham was born in Coventry, England. At school, he excelled in both academic studies and sports, and as a result, received a university scholarship. Following two years of National Service with the British Army, Graham enrolled in Civil Engineering at Imperial College, London. He graduated in 1961. After one year of experience in dam construction in Sierra Leone, he returned to Imperial College for post-graduate studies and received a DIC in Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering in 1963.

Graham worked briefly in the U.K. after graduation and then, with his wife Susan, emigrated to Canada to join Geocon Ltd, where he worked for eight years, initially as a geotechnical engineer and then as manager of Geocon's offices in Fredericton and Halifax.

Graham decided to diversify his experience in the geotechnical field, particularly in the mining industry. In 1973, he and Susan moved to South Africa, where Graham joined Bateman Engineering Group as a senior geotechnical engineer. In the next 14 years, he gained considerable widely-based experience in applying geotechnology to large mining and industrial projects. Significantly, one of his projects provided motivation for his later interests and achievements as a historian. Graham returned to Canada in 1987 and a year later joined Suncor Ltd in Fort McMurray, Alberta to deal with the special challenges associated with management of tailings from oilsands.

Graham's retirement from his professional career in 1993 was followed by a new chapter in his life, this time as a historian on scientific matters and an author of books and articles on other topics. As a historian, two books reflected his geotechnical experience. *Oak Island and its Lost Treasure*, co-authored with geotechnical engineer Les MacPhie, describes major subsurface investigations carried out on the island over many years. Graham's work with Bateman on the construction of a potash plant near the Dead Sea led to *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: a Geotechnical Perspective*, co-authored with geologist Tony Beardow, and published in 1995 in the Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology. The paper notes that the cities were built on an alluvial plain bordering the Dead Sea and made a

persuasive case they were destroyed by liquefaction of the alluvium triggered by a severe earthquake around 2350 BC. Following publication, the BBC invited Graham to participate in the production of a documentary in its Ancient Apocalypses series. This led in turn to a new book to be published in 2015, *The Destruction of Sodom – a Scientific Commentary*.

Graham's publications on other topics included several books of general interest including; *Treasure and Intrigue: The Legacy of Captain Kidd*, 2002; *The Golden Reef of Sir William Phips*, 2005; *The Smuggler's Revenge and Other Curious Tales*, 2008; and *Murder at the Coliseum*, 2010.

Graham was known for his warm personality, a dry wit and as a raconteur. His achievements as engineer, historian and author set him apart from most geotechnical engineers. He is survived by Susan, his wife of 48 years.