

BRIAN ISHERWOOD (1934–2022)

By Nadir Ansari and Silke Lambert



Brian Isherwood was a pioneer in the geotechnical construction industry of the Greater Toronto Area. He was known as an innovator, who introduced numerous technologies to the Canadian excavation shoring and ground engineering industries.

Born on April 15, 1934, near London (England), Brian studied structural engineering at the University of Birmingham. After stints in Britain and Yemen, which sparked his interest in soil mechanics, he immigrated to Canada with his young family in 1966. He joined Franki Canada in Toronto, where he became involved with novel shoring techniques at the time, such as soil anchors and caisson walls. In 1972, Brian founded his own company, Brian Isherwood and Associates – later renamed Isherwood Geostructural Engineers. The company remains one of the leading geostructural engineering firms in Canada.

Starting out as a one-man business, Brian was the first in the GTA, possibly Canada, to include extensive monitoring in his shoring designs. As early as 1973, he used one of the first available digital inclinometers, and became an advocate for the use of the 'observational method' in the design and construction of geotechnical structures. The 1980s marked Brian's pioneering designs for waterfront excavations on the shore of Lake Ontario. In the mid-1990s, he became involved with tunnel and station designs for the Toronto subway expansion.

Brian made important contributions to iconic construction projects in Toronto and beyond: the CN Tower, the Skydome (Rogers Centre), the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), the Opera House, the pedestrian tunnel at Billy Bishop Airport, the Sarnia Rail Tunnel emergency rescue shaft, The Bow in Calgary and countless commercial and condo high rises in downtown Toronto. Brian received the Ontario Professional Engineering Award for Engineering Excellence as well as the Canadian Geotechnical Society's Southern Ontario Section Award in 2015. He was also one of eight southern Ontario pioneers honoured by the CGS at GeoNiagara in 2022.

Both in his professional and social life, Brian was a man of wide interests, an advocate of lifelong learning, a passionate problem-solver and a generous, enthusiastic mentor. Outside the engineering community, Brian gravitated towards music and theatre. He performed as an actor and singer, both in England and Canada, and directed his own shows; Gilbert and Sullivan operas were his favourites. He also was active with several choirs, including being director of his church choir in Oakville.

Brian passed away on September 24, 2022, leaving behind his wife, Diana, his four children Katika, Simon, Sarah and Timothy, as well as ten grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He will be missed as a truly inspirational man who touched many people's lives.