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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



Professor Tony Cusens, OBE

Colleagues will be sorry to learn of the death, on 30 May 2020, of Emeritus Professor Tony Cusens, former Head of the School of Civil Engineering and Dean of Engineering. The following obituary has been contributed by Professor Muhammed Basheer.

Professor Anthony Ralph Cusens was born in Emsworth, Hampshire in 1927. Following National Service in the RAF from 1946 to 1948 he became a student at University College, London, from where, despite the diversions of playing hockey for the University, he graduated in 1951. He stayed on as a research student, but in 1952 was recruited by the British Cast Concrete Federation where he spent two years carrying out research in the precast concrete industry before joining the teaching staff of the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham in 1954.

His next move, in 1956, was a major one – to a senior lectureship in Civil Engineering at the new University of Khartoum, Sudan; but in 1960 he moved even further afield to Bangkok to join a multi-national team responsible for initiating a postgraduate programme in structural engineering at the SEATO Graduate School of Engineering, where he became Professor of Structural Engineering. He looks back on this period as five happy, constructive and exciting years.

In 1965 Professor Cusens was appointed to the new chair of civil engineering at Queen's College, Dundee, which two years later became the new University of Dundee. In 1978 he was invited to become Professor of Civil Engineering and Head of Department at Leeds on the resignation of Professor Adam Neville (who was himself moving to the University of Dundee, as Vice-Chancellor). He took up his chair at Leeds in January 1979, and continued as Head of Department until September 1990.

During his long period as Head, Professor Cusens introduced a new spirit into the Department: he was resolved to consult widely with staff on all major issues and to develop a type of leadership based on 'cabinet' rather than authoritarian principles. This did much to increase staff morale, and resulted in the Department maintaining its position not only as the largest civil engineering department in the country, but also one with a high academic reputation.

Throughout his academic career Professor Cusens remained in close touch with professional practice and acted as a consultant on many problems related to concrete structures, ranging from housing and bridges to the Channel Tunnel. These involvements were recognised by many outside bodies. He was President of the Concrete Society in 1983-84; was appointed by the Department of Transport as a Visitor to the Transport and Road Research Laboratory between 1981 and 1987; was Vice-Chairman of the International Association for Bridge & Structural Engineering (IABSE) from 1977 to 1989; became elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1974 and the Fellowship of Engineering in 1988; and was President of the Institution of Structural Engineers for 1991-92. In addition, he served on numerous professional committees, and the extent of his wide-ranging involvement was formally recognised in 1989 when he was awarded the OBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to the Department of Transport. He played a full part in University affairs too, serving on a number of University and Faculty Committees, and as Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at University of Leeds between 1989 and 1991.

Tony Cusens and his wife, Pauline, lived at Bramham and they had three daughters - Deborah, Rebecca and Sarah – and six grandchildren. Both Pauline and Tony were enthusiastic golfers and ardent gardeners. Tony died on 30 May 2020, at the age of 92. He had lived a long, full and happy life and it was his time to go, but nevertheless, we will miss him very much.

The funeral service will held on Monday 15 June 2020, on which day the flag on the Parkinson Building will be flown at half-mast in his memory.