The Fourteenth Glossop Lecture

Introduction to the Fourteenth Glossop Lecture

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Glossop Medallists, guests, ladies and gentlemen ....

During the 50 year history of the Geological Society’s Engineering Group, engineering geology, together with its brother in arms, geotechnical engineering, has been an undoubted success as a valuable technical discipline. Engineering geology is also, I believe, a fascinating and rewarding career, being founded on the practical application of geological science. For me, and I suspect many in this lecture hall, it provides a means of doing what we love and what fascinates us—geology—and being paid for doing it!

This year’s Glossop Medallist, Professor Jim Griffiths, has worked through much of this half-century of engineering geological progress. In a wide-ranging career, he has been involved with the application of engineering geology to the practical needs of the civil engineering, environmental and other sectors that are an essential part of the complex world in which we live.

I first met Jim at the site of the Channel Tunnel Rail Terminal near Folkestone. It was 1988, a quarter of a century ago. Jim was there to make an engineering geomorphological map of the landslide complex at the foot of the North Downs where the terminal and tunnel portals were to be built. At that time, Jim was Technical Director at Geomorphological Services Ltd.

But his career had begun rather more than a decade earlier at the University of London. Having been awarded a BSc in Geography with Geology by Bedford College, he moved to King’s College, where he came under the influence of Professor Denys Brunsden and Professor Peter Fookes, both former Glossop Medallists. Jim’s PhD at King’s was on ‘Flood hazard assessment for highway design in hot deserts’.

In 1979, on leaving King’s, Jim joined the geotechnical department of Rendel Palmer & Tritton, and for the next 14 years he worked on civil engineering projects in the UK and overseas. These years included periods at two specialist consultancies: Geomorphological Services Ltd (which I have already mentioned) and Engineering Geology Ltd (where he was the Associate responsible for their Engineering Geology & Geomorphology Division).

In 1993 Jim had a change of career path. He joined Plymouth University as a lecturer in engineering geology. Since then, Jim has risen through the ranks at Plymouth to become Head of the School of Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences. And in May of this year, Jim was appointed Dean of Research & Innovation.

But Jim has his feet firmly on the ground: as well as holding senior academic management posts, he is Professor of Engineering Geology & Geomorphology at Plymouth, where he teaches final year undergraduate modules in engineering geology and terrain evaluation for engineering practice.

It is from his mixed background of industrial and academic experience (as a doer, as a teacher, and as an academic manager) that he will be speaking to us this evening. And so it gives me great pleasure to invite Professor Jim Griffiths to deliver the 14th Glossop Lecture: ‘Feet on the Ground: Engineering Geology, Past, Present and Future’.