

Professor Emeritus status conferred on Wits Mining Professor Huw Phillips

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Professor Huw Phillips of Wits Mining School

After 27 years as a full professor at the School of Mining Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand, Huw Phillips has been honoured with the status of Professor Emeritus for his outstanding contribution to the University.

He was also recently named as the 2013 winner of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy's prestigious Brigadier Stokes Memorial Award for his unique input to the industry over many years.

'Professor Phillips has excelled at everything he had been asked to do within the School since his appointment as Head of Mining Engineering in January 1986,' said Professor Fred Cawood, current Head of the School. 'His main contributions have been in the areas of research – where he successfully supervised 19 PhDs and 40 MScs.

'He gave the School tremendous service during his 25-year tenure as Head of School. His standing in the profession is extremely high, and he was recently honoured by the Institute of Mine Surveyors of South Africa, the Mine Ventilation Society of South Africa,

and the International Society of Mining Professors.'

Professor Phillips stepped down as Head of School at the end of 2009, but continued as the Chair of Mining Engineering until his retirement in 2012. He continues to work in a post-retirement capacity, supervising postgraduate students, implementing the new mine ventilation area of postgraduate specialization, and serving on the School's executive committee and editorial boards.

Professor Phillips began his career with an electrical engineering degree, working for the National Coal Board, the agency tasked with running the coal mines of the UK. He soon returned to his studies, this time in mining engineering at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

His work focused on improving the productivity of the country's collieries through mechanization – at a time when some underground operations still used pit ponies to haul coal and equipment. He then became involved in research into tunnelling, a field in which important strides were being taken at that time.

But underlying much of his growing expertise was a pre-occupation with health and safety. He had grown up in village just six kilometres from Aberfan, where a tragic coal-tip slide in 1966 killed 144 people – 116 of them schoolchildren. He had arrived home from university on the day of the disaster for a family function, and took part in the recovery operations alongside hundreds of local residents.

When he took up a lecturing post at the University of New South Wales in Australia, this provided an outlet for these concerns. Although productivity in the Australian coal mining industry was much higher than in the UK, this had resulted in growing health and safety hazards such as higher methane and dust levels, and even underground explosions. He began working on designs that would address these health and safety issues.



Seen at the celebratory function (left to right) were: Mr Michael Livingstone-Blevins, Chairman, METF Committee; Professor Frederick Cawood, Head of School of Mining; Professor Emeritus Huw Phillips, School of Mining Engineering; Mrs Beatrix Phillips; and Professor Ian Jandrell, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment.



Professor Huw Phillips receiving his Professor Emeritus Certificate from Head of the Wits School of Mining Engineering Professor Fred Cawood

After spending his sabbatical leave in South Africa in 1981 with the Chamber of Mines Research Organisation (Comro) – then the largest private research establishment in the southern hemisphere – he returned in 1985 as Chamber of Mines Professor of Mining Engineering at Wits, to become Head of Department later the same year.

'There was overwhelming support in the School Executive for recommending the award of Professor Emeritus status to Professor Phillips,' said Professor Cawood, 'and it is befitting that the university has now bestowed this honour.'

S. Braham