

International Society for
Soil Mechanics and
Geotechnical Engineering

Time Capsule



The British Geotechnical Association

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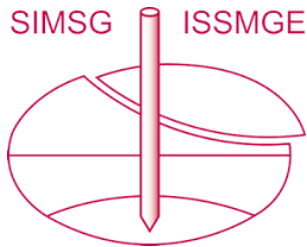
Introduction

The history of what is currently the British Geotechnical Association starts in 1947 when the *British National Committee of the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering (ISSMFE)* was formed. It held its first meeting in 1949. In 1964, it changed its name to the *British Geotechnical Society (BGS)* to include rock mechanics in its scope, following the establishment of the International Society for Rock Mechanics (ISRM) in 1962. It changed its name to the *British Geotechnical Association (BGA)* in June 2000, to reflect a merger of the BGS with the Ground Board of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). It remains a Specialist Knowledge Society of the ICE.

Cooling et al. (1975) describe the early days of the development of geotechnical engineering in the UK. This started with the establishment of the Building Research Station (BRS) that undertook early work on earth pressures from 1929. L.F. Cooling attended the 1st International Conference on Soil Mechanics in Harvard, USA in 1936. A.W. Skempton moved into geotechnical work at that time. H.Q. Golder joined in 1937. Fig. 1 shows Golder, Skempton and Cooling at an investigation at Chingford Reservoir in 1937. A Soil Mechanics discussion group was formed in 1940 that held regular meetings. The first European Conference was held in London in 1950.



Fig. 1. Eminent geotechnical engineers at Chingford reservoir in 1937. From left: H. Q. Golder; A. Skempton; anon; dog; R. Wynne-Edwards (R.E); L. F. Cooling (courtesy Christine Cooling).



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The first lecture courses on Soil Mechanics were delivered at Kings College, University of Durham (in Newcastle) and University College London in 1938-39. The journal *Géotechnique* was first published in 1948 under the editorship of R. Glossop and H.Q. Golder.

Events and Awards

The British Geotechnical Association hosts a number of prestigious events and awards, including the premier geotechnical lecture, the Rankine Lecture (Anon, 2018).

- The annual **Rankine Lecture** is named after William John Macquorn Rankine, best known to geotechnical engineers for his theory on earth pressures, which was published in 1857. In 1961, the BGS instigated the internationally acclaimed Rankine Lecture as recognition of his contribution to soil mechanics. The 60th lecture was held in 2022.
- The **Cooling Prize** competition for young geotechnical engineers is held annually and marked its 50th anniversary in 2019. The event is named after Leonard Cooling, who is widely regarded as the father of British soil mechanics after he set up the first proper soil mechanics laboratory at the Building Research Station (BRS) in 1934.
- The **Skempton Medal** is named after Sir Alec Skempton and is awarded to a BGA member who has made an outstanding contribution to the practice of geotechnical engineering over a sustained period of time. Skempton joined the BRS as a geotechnical engineer and was appointed to the Imperial College staff in 1946. He was instrumental in establishing soil mechanics as an academic discipline and became one of its leading figures.
- The **Fleming Award** is an annual project award to commemorate the life and work of Ken Fleming, who was chief engineer at Cementation Skanska Foundations. Fleming joined Cementation in 1968 where he remained until retirement.
- The **John Mitchell Award** is presented to individuals who, in the course of their careers via incremental works, have made significant contribution to geotechnical practice. It commemorates the life and work of John Mitchell whose life was cut short suddenly and tragically in a construction site accident in 1990. Mitchell's professional life was closely associated with Arup Geotechnics, which he joined in 1968.



References

Cooling, L. F., Skempton, A. W., Glossop, R. & Golder, H. Q. (1975). *British Geotechnical Society Twenty-fifth Anniversary Report*, *Géotechnique* 25, No. 4, 629-656.

Anon. (2018) *Geotechnical heritage: What's in a name?* Ground Engineering, <https://www.geplus.co.uk/features/geotechnical-heritage-whats-in-a-name-28-11-2018/> (accessed 27th April 2022).