

Feature



My life after Loughborough



Wilfred Chan studied Civil Engineering at Loughborough between 1953 and 1957 graduating with First Class Honours. He was awarded the D.Tech (Hon) in 1991 when Sir David Davies was Vice-Chancellor.

In his early career, Wilfred worked for petro-chemical giants Shell and Esso. He rose to be a Board Member of Esso Hong Kong before he set up his own firm of management consultants in 1986.

Wilfred lives in Hong Kong and is the founder and former Chairman of the Hong Kong branch of the Guild of Loughborough University.



Wilfred (pictured centre) at surveying camp in Wales, circa 1956

What made you choose Loughborough? Was this the first time you had been to England and how was your journey here?

After World War II and with the physical world needing rebuilding, my grandpa thought that engineering would be an ideal profession to pursue. My grandpa was a die-hard anglophile. He told all his grandchildren that we should go to England to obtain our tertiary education. As a result, five of his grandsons all went to Loughborough. We were first cousins and all studied Civil Engineering between 1951 and 1959, which must be a record for any family.

When I flew to England in September 1953, it took me nearly three days as we had to stop at seven cities on the way. But as the aircraft only took 40 passengers, I had a great time on the flight. The seats were wide and had plenty of legroom and the food was excellent too!

What was your 'Loughborough University experience' like?

When I was a student in the 1950s, Shell used to send their scholarship students to Loughborough and they were the richest scholars on our campus. In the 1950s, there were not many buildings on the main campus. In fact, the Schofield Building was the only specially built building with proper lecture halls. We had students from many countries and other than getting an excellent engineering education, Loughborough gave me two wonderful lifelong friends in Richard Evans and Cato Haugland. Richard looked after my son and daughter when they went to public schools in England. Our two families are still close friends to this day. Cato very sadly died about 10 years ago. His Norwegian family and mine met a number of times in Hong Kong and Oslo. If I were not a student at Loughborough, I could never have hoped to have two great friendships.

After Loughborough, you worked in engineering – can you tell us more about your career?

After Loughborough, I mainly worked in the oil industry for Shell and Esso. I learned all my management skills from them. I was initially involved in petroleum related engineering projects before I branched out to management.

Always conscious of spreading Loughborough's name, I became very involved with the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE) when I was with Esso. I rose through the ranks to become the President of HKIE which encompasses all the various disciplines of engineering.

You've enjoyed a very successful career. What advice would you give to your fellow alumni?

The advice I would give is have a never-say-die spirit, but be humble. Always be generous and helpful to those who cross your path. Whenever you participate in any negotiation, please remember to leave a few pennies on the table – be fair-minded. Be responsible for all you do and don't ever forget your friends – high and low.

What would you say is your greatest achievement, either in life or your private life?

I have been fortunate enough to have achieved the three goals I have set for myself. I always wanted to be on the top of my profession, my social scale and run my own business. I believe I have achieved all three.

I became the President of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers in 1985 and was awarded the Honorary D.Tech by my Alma Mater in 1991.

In 1984, I became the first Chinese citizen to serve on any committee of the Hong Kong Club (established by the British in 1846 and still the most prestigious Club in Hong Kong – no Chinese members were admitted until 1965!), when I was invited by the Chairman to serve in the House and Building Sub-Committee. I became the Vice-Chairman of this Club before resigning in 1997 due to ill health. I was very proud of this particular achievement, being so well accepted by the high and mighty in Hong Kong society.

I started my own management company in 1986, thus working for myself and fulfilling the last wish of my life.

You were involved in establishing a chapter in Hong Kong of the Guild of Past Students – what made you want to get involved with your alma mater and why should alumni stay connected?

In the 1950s and 1960s, society in Hong Kong was dominated by University of Hong Kong graduates. Very few people had heard of Loughborough, so I started a branch of the Guild in 1961 to try to counter this trend. One initiative was to get members of the Guild, including the late CHAN Nai Keong, CBE, JP, FICE (the most senior engineer in the Hong Kong Government) to give blood to the Red Cross. Awarded a D Tech (Hon) by Loughborough University, Dr Chan was the first Chinese citizen to become Secretary for Lands and Works in the Hong Kong Government and was in charge of thousands of engineers, architects and surveyors. When he participated his photo appeared in all the newspapers in Hong Kong, giving the Guild great publicity.

I sincerely hope that our graduates will not forget their heritage. Go out and spread the name of our university and make an impact.

Despite all your success, what ambitions would you like to realise?

My last ambition is to see Loughborough again before I kick the bucket. As I am now 80, the chance of this happening is remote. But there is no harm in dreaming.