

FRANK RHODES was the archetypal English gentleman and scholar. He made important contributions to palaeontology and achieved international prestige as a university teacher, administrator and policymaker, especially in the US, where he became a citizen and pursued most of his distinguished career.

Education and early career

Born in Warwickshire, UK, Rhodes was awarded three degrees by Birmingham University: BSc (1948), PhD (1950) and DSc (1963). He won a Fulbright Scholarship, spent at the University of Illinois, USA (1950–51), then taught at Durham University (1951–54).

He returned to Illinois as Assistant, then Associate Professor (1954–1956) and was appointed to the Chair of Geology in the University College of Wales, Swansea, in 1956, at the exceptionally young age of 29. In 1965, Rhodes was awarded a Visiting Research Fellowship by the US National Science Foundation, which he spent at Ohio State University. In 1967, he was elected Dean of Science at Swansea and was recipient of the Geological Society's Bigsby Medal.

These periods of transatlantic peregrination were clearly beneficial to Rhodes' research, now focused on the systematics, biology and biostratigraphic value of conodonts, complementing his expanding interests in broader evolutionary topics. The links established then provided research opportunities for research students and postdoctoral fellows, and led to fruitful collaborations with leading American palaeontologists and biostratigraphers, such as Harold Scott and Charles Collinson, several of whom spent sabbatical periods at Swansea during Rhodes' 12 years' tenure there.

Michigan and Cornell

In 1968, Rhodes joined the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) as a Professor in the School of Geology and Mineralogy. He became Dean of their College of Literature, Science and the Arts in 1972, and served as Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Michigan from 1974 until 1977. He then became President of Cornell University, where he remained until his retirement in 1995 (as the longest-serving University Head in the Ivy League).

His time at Cornell was marked by innovation, enterprise and inclusiveness, significantly

expanding the degree courses offered and enhancing recruitment of female and minority-group students and staff, alongside a much expanded range of the research topics pursued – all accomplished through greatly increased external funding. Rhodes built or strengthened academic links for Cornell with many overseas universities and research institutions, from Saudi Arabia to Cambridge, Hong Kong to Oxford, and was awarded some 35 honorary degrees and fellowships, including Honorary Fellowship of the Geological Society of London.

Rhodes became an influential member of the US National Academy of Sciences and was consulted on academic and scientific policy matters by four US Presidents. His eloquence and ability to convey complex concepts to lay audiences meant that even in retirement he was greatly in demand as a speaker, both in the USA and internationally.

Important contributions

Throughout his long career at Cornell, Rhodes continued to make important contributions in the fields of evolution, geology, palaeontology and the history of science, as encapsulated in a series of books and compilations including *The Evolution of Life*, *Language of the Earth*, and *Earth: A Tenant's Manual*. He also contributed to several geology-related titles in the popular *Golden* series for younger readers.

Perhaps the most telling testimony to Rhodes' academic standing, charismatic appeal and popular esteem is conveyed by the announcement made, shortly after his official retirement from Cornell, by the Mayor of Ithaca, New York, that his birth date would henceforth be celebrated annually in that city as Frank H.T. Rhodes Day!

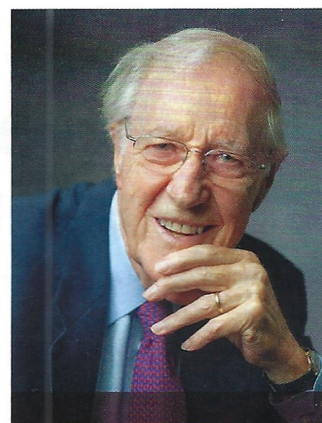
Rhodes is survived by his wife Rosa, daughters Jennifer, Catherine, Penelope and Deborah, 11 grandchildren and one great granddaughter. **G**

Contact

If you would like to contribute an obituary, please email the editor geoscientist@geolsoc.org.uk

Roll of Honour

Deceased Fellows for whom no obituary is forthcoming have their names and dates recorded in a Roll of Honour at www.geolsoc.org.uk/obituaries



**FRANK HAROLD
TREVOR
RHODES
1926–2020**

**Influential
palaeontologist,
teacher,
administrator
and policymaker
who achieved
international
prestige**

**BY GILBERT
KELLING, WITH
CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM RON AUSTIN,
JOHN COPE AND
TONY RAMSAY**

Pictured, above:
innovation, enterprise
and inclusiveness were
hallmarks of Frank's work

Image credit: Robert Barker/Cornell University