Dr Frank Alexander Middlemiss  
QMC, BSc Geology, 1950; PhD 1955  
b 25 03 20, d 22 01 14

Frank Middlemiss, who has died aged 93, was well known in Britain and overseas for his teaching and research work in geology. He worked all his life at Queen Mary College, London (now Queen Mary University of London), where his career culminated in an honorary fellowship.

Born in east London, he served during the Second World War in the Royal Army Medical Corps, mainly in UK, India, Iraq, and all countries west to Tunisia. He was in action in Tunisia with the 8th Army and Italy with the 5th Army (from the first morning at Salerno). The Anzio landings saw his company cut off behind enemy lines and he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. Having learned German at school, he acted as a translator between allied and German officers.

In 1946 he began his studies at QMC, graduating with first class honours in 1950 and being awarded a PhD in 1955 on Lower Cretaceous brachiopods (a type of shellfish). Unlike the dinosaurs, which have left us only a few fragmentary fossil skeletons, brachiopods have left countless millions of fossils, permitting their evolution to be studied over geological time. His main research interests were Mesozoic Brachiopoda, with special emphasis on systematic, palaeoecological and palaeobiogeographical studies of the Lower Cretaceous Terebratulida; the Lower Greensand of England; Structure and Geomorphology of southern England. His expertise on the chalk cliffs of Kent was put to good use during the Channel Tunnel design; on his advice, a slight wiggle was made in the tunnel to avoid a crack in the chalk. During the construction, he was taken down and shown the tunneling in progress. He was given the Foulerton Award in 1972 by the Geologists’ Association, and they elected him an honorary life member in 1994. He was a founder member of the Palaeontological Association, and a member of several working groups affiliated to the International Union of Geological Societies, where he did work in Paris, Padua, Neuchatel, Heligoland, Poland and other countries.

He had a long and varied career lecturing, examining, conducting research, overseeing research students, advising public bodies, leading field meetings and liaising with prominent geologists in his field both in the UK and worldwide. In 1982, during a round of cuts when much of the college’s main-stream geology was transferred to UCL, he agreed to retire, yet continued to perform all his teaching, research and administrative duties unpaid for 14 years. He was made Reader Emeritus and continued full-time until the department closed in 1996. In excellent health, even in his 70s, he continued to lead field trips, striding ahead of the undergraduates, who often struggled to keep up with him. He stayed in touch with former students all over the world and produced the “Old Students’ Newsletter” for many years.
He met his future wife, Florence, a fellow student, in his first week at QMC in October 1946, when she approached him to ask what books had been recommended for the course. He determined from that first moment that she would be his wife and they were married in 1949, when he was still an undergraduate, and lived at first in an attic in Camden Town.

He had an almost encyclopedic knowledge, ranging across a huge variety of eclectic interests, including music (especially Mozart), opera, ballet, the theatre, history, archaeology, wine and winemaking, animal and plant life and even train timetables. Sadly, in the last years of his life, he lost the ability to enjoy listening to music, due to deafness. He stood unsuccessfully for Hornsey Borough Council for the Liberal Party in 1960 and was Chairman of the Woodford Liberal Party in the early 1960s. From 1981 – 2004 he was Chairman of the ACE Residents’ Association in the part of Woodford where he lived, and he became a very well-known figure locally, often to be seen out and about with his dog. He was a governor of a group of schools in the Borough of Waltham Forest (including his old grammar school) 1981 – 1987.

His last years were spent caring for his wife, who lived to see their diamond wedding anniversary. He is survived by his two daughters, Stella and Joan, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

*The above obituary was kindly supplied by Dr Middlemiss’ daughter, Stella.*