Obituary

On June 20, as the summer solstice moon reached its apex, Emeritus Professor Peter G. Simpkins, PhD, NAE, passed from this life surrounded by family and close friends. A visitation will be held at Wm. A. Bradley & Son Funeral Home, 345 Main St. in Chatham, NJ, on Wednesday, July 6 at 1pm, followed immediately by a memorial service at 3pm. For details or to send a condolence, please visit www.bradleyfuneralhomes.com.

Born in 1934 and raised in London, Dr. Simpkins was among the first class of merit-based students to attend William Ellis School and went on to complete an engineering apprenticeship at Handley Page Aircraft Co. He continued to expand his understanding of engineering as a scholar at Belgium’s von Karman Institute, as a NATO Fellow at the California Institute of Technology, where he received his MS, and at Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, where he earned his Ph.D. in aeronautics.

In 1965, he emigrated with his family to the United States and began work with Boston-based AVCO Corporation, where he studied problems associated with missile and rocket re-entry, most notably for the NASA Apollo space missions. In 1969, Dr. Simpkins began a 37-year career at Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey, where he focused on materials processing problems. He was conferred the title of Distinguished Member of Technical Staff in 1983.

Among his career achievements are numerous patents for his work in fiber optics. His contributions to this area were recognized by the National Academy for Engineering when he was elected a member to that institution in 1999. He was elected a fellow of the American Physical Society in 2010 in recognition of his work in fluid mechanics. Dr. Simpkins was also elected a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 2010 and worked on several NASA review boards, and reviewed numerous scientific journals.
Additionally, he served as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Lehigh University, where he guided numerous Ph.D. candidates through the dissertation process. In 2002, Dr. Simpkins was appointed as University Professor at Syracuse University’s L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science where he taught and advised graduate students until his retirement in 2007. An avid history buff and self-proclaimed Renaissance man, Dr. Simpkins incorporated aspects of social sciences and literature as part of his curriculum to provide his students with a sense of the evolution of mathematics, physics and engineering. Dr. Simpkins remained active in research and review until his death.

Beyond academia, Dr. Simpkins enjoyed various interests including jazz music, stamp collecting, painting, photography, tennis, and fishing. An avid bird-watcher and naturalist, he introduced many a visitor to New Jersey to the nearby Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, its Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center Hummingbird garden, and the Raptor Trust. He also was a long-time supporter of public broadcasting, enjoying Masterpiece Theatre and Mystery in particular.

He is survived by his wife, Marion; daughters, Tracy, Lisa and Fiona; and grandchildren, James, Kimberly, Nick, Chelsea and Charlie. To paraphrase one of his favorite sayings, he has taught us all he knows, pass it on.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in memoriam to: The Raptor Trust, 1390 White Bridge Rd, Millington, NJ 07946 or [www.theraptortrust.org](http://www.theraptortrust.org)