

Obituary: Martin Dewar Aloysius Prendergast (1948–2025)

Martin Prendergast was born on 6 December 1948 in Chislehurst, England, to an Irish father and a Scottish mother. He was educated at Stonyhurst College, a Jesuit school in Lancashire whose emphasis on discipline, service, and outdoor pursuits left a lasting impression. Surprisingly, he did not do well academically and scored very poorly in his A-level examinations. As a result he took a gap year that would shape the rest of his life and prove to be of huge benefit to Zimbabwe.

In 1968 Martin travelled to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where he worked as a missionary assistant at St Peter's Kubatana in Glen Nora, a Jesuit-run secondary school. He taught English and History, assisted with practical work including brick-laying, and directed productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*. He also became fluent in Chishona. ~~and~~ It was whilst at St Peter's that he met Susan Kasiyamhuru, who would become his wife.

After a year, he returned to the UK to improve his A-level results before returning to Rhodesia in the early 1970s.



Martin married Susan in 1979 at St John's High School chapel in Emerald Hill, following the payment of lobola. Susan worked as a school secretary at St Johns and later as bursar at the Dominican Convent in Harare. Together they lived in Kwekwe and later Harare, raising two daughters, Miranda (born 1981) and Catriona (born 1984), both having PhDs, distinguished academic careers and families of their own. Martin and Susan have four grandchildren.

Martin enrolled at the University of Rhodesia in 1973 to study geology, graduating in 1977 with a first-class Special Honours degree. He began his career in 1978 with Union Carbide, working on a range of exploration projects including the Wedza South Hill platinum deposit, later developed as the Mimosa Mine. His dedication to fieldwork became legendary; when security conditions forced the mine to close, Martin stayed on alone to complete his underground mapping, with instructions to turn off the lights when he left.

Between 1980 and 1981, Martin completed a Master's degree in Mineral Exploration at Imperial College London, graduating with Distinction. His work on the Mimosa Mine formed the basis of his doctoral research, and he was awarded a PhD by the University of Zimbabwe in June 1989 for his thesis on the stratigraphy and petrology of the Wedza Subchamber of the Great Dyke.

In the late 1980s Martin worked for Cluff Resources and then Anglo American, before becoming an independent consultant in 1991. Over a career spanning more than four decades, he established himself as one of the foremost experts on the geology of the Great Dyke. However, his research interests were wide-ranging and international, encompassing layered igneous complexes in South Africa, Botswana, Bolivia, and Tanzania, as well as Archaean chromite and nickel deposits and stratigraphy in Zimbabwe.

Martin authored and co-authored 38 scientific papers, many as sole author, an exceptional achievement given his independence from academic institutions and research grants. He also published several important papers on pre-colonial iron and tin smelting in Zimbabwe, examining ore sources and furnace technologies. He co-edited and contributed to two major volumes: *Magmatic Sulphides – The*

Zimbabwe Volume (1989) and *Mining in Zimbabwe from the 6th to the 21st Centuries* (2019), the latter a landmark synthesis of the country's mining history.

He was deeply committed to sharing geological knowledge. Martin organised and assisted with three excursions to the Great Dyke, including those associated with the Fifth Magmatic Sulphides Field Conference in 1987 and the 8th International Platinum Symposium in 1989.

In 2016 he delivered the A.M. Macgregor Memorial Lecture, a prestigious award granted by the Geological Society of Zimbabwe to a scientist of international repute. He was also awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Geological Society of Zimbabwe and was the recipient of a record seven A.E. Phaup Awards for the most significant paper on Zimbabwean geology in a calendar year.

Colleagues recall Martin as a formidable and tireless field geologist: fit, strong, and seemingly impervious to the midday sun. His field days were marked by ritual tea breaks, brewed faithfully by his assistants. Martin had an extraordinary intellect, curiosity and understanding of geological processes. He was generous with his knowledge, inspiring generations of geologists through his insight, enthusiasm, and mentorship.

In 2002, with their daughters settled in the UK and his mother in Scotland, Martin and Susan moved to Scotland. Although nominally retired, Martin continued consulting and scholarly work. In his leisure time he developed a passion for gardening, growing fruit and producing jams and puddings much loved by his family.

In 2020, Martin was diagnosed with cancer, a condition that progressively limited his physical strength. Despite this, he remained intellectually active and characteristically determined, never abandoning his work or his curiosity.

Martin Prendergast died at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee, Scotland, on 18 November 2025. He is remembered as an exceptional geologist, a generous colleague, a devoted husband, father and grandfather; and a man whose contributions to the understanding of Zimbabwe's geology and mining history will endure.

(Prepared by Tony Martin with contributions from many of Martin's colleagues. Thanks to his family for the photograph)