



Jock McCulloch (1945-2018)

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Compiled by: Gill Nelson, Editor-in-Chief, Occupational Health Southern Africa

On 18 January 2018, one of the Greats of occupational health, Jock McCulloch, passed away from mesothelioma in Melbourne, a mere nine months after being diagnosed with the deadly cancer. Pavla Miller, his partner of 30 years, broke the news to his friends and colleagues who immediately responded with deep sadness at the loss of this remarkable man who had dedicated much of his life to researching asbestos issues in South Africa. "His exposure to blue asbestos was probably in South Africa during the mid-1990s, when he was researching a book on the history of mining," said Pavla. "Until late November, Jock was able to work on his manuscript on gold mining, migrant labour and corruption of scientific knowledge in southern Africa..." Pavla worked with Jock on his last book, as yet unpublished, which she describes as "another lasting testament to his remarkable contribution to historical scholarship and the fight of workers and communities for justice".

"It is very hard accepting that Jock is gone. Although I had known about his illness, I thought there would be more time. We had been working on a piece together and I had let some follow-ups lapse – now, it is too late. Nevertheless, I used some of what Jock and I discussed as the basis for a tribute ... The link for the article entitled In Memory of Jock McCulloch is: <http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-in-memory-of-jock-mcculloch.php>."

*Laurie Kazan-Allen,
International Ban Asbestos Secretariat*

"I am so sorry to hear that Jock has died from mesothelioma... It's just so hard to believe. Jock was one of a handful of people who have deeply investigated and analyzed the history of the asbestos pandemic, now estimated to cause 280 000 deaths a year. His thoroughness and persistence in seeking to understand this history in every way left behind an extraordinary volume of published work."

Barry Castleman, Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO) Science Advisory Board Member

"Jock was a sincere advocate for all those affected by the ravages of asbestos. His work will long stand in the struggle for achieving an asbestos-free world. He will be missed as we mourn his passing, but his memory will remain in our thoughts among all who admired his life's work."

*Dr Richard Lemen, Assistant Surgeon General,
US Public Health Service (retired)*

"In Jock's final years he was a generous colleague. One of his final acts of generosity was to share with us his enormous collection of materials on silicosis and asbestosis in South Africa and Australia. ... It is with great irony and sadness that today is the day that we are launching a website with his collection included. For those of you who want to see a small piece of Jock's extraordinary contribution to scholarship you might want to check out <https://www.toxicdocs.org/blog/remembering-jock-mcculloch/>. His legacy lives in the research and advocacy that was so integral to him and that is obvious in the primary materials he collected ... What a wonderful, decent man he was. All of us here at Columbia remember his warmth, dedication, scholarship and companionship."

David Rosner, Columbia University

"I am moved to tears as I remember Jock and his magnificent contribution to the cause of justice and fairness in South Africa ... I always respected his drive, courage and fairness as a crusader for the rights of asbestos workers and communities ... please convey ... a message of love and support from the trustees and staff of the Kgalagadi Relief Trust, which in many ways owes its existence to the pioneering work of health and safety warriors like Jock."

Brian Gibson, Chairman, Kgalagadi Relief Trust

"This is such terribly sad and devastating news about Jock's passing. The news of Jock's passing is devastating - to his family, to international colleagues and, importantly, to the many workers and communities exposed to industrial hazards on whose behalf he worked so valiantly."

Lundy Braun, Brown University

"Jock McCulloch will be remembered widely, and for many decades, as the author or co-author of many important books about asbestos mining and milling, and gold mining, in southern Africa. I have three of them and have read them with care and great interest as part of the historical foundation for the legal proceedings in connection with the neglect of dust control in this country. The work that went into them was truly impressive. I was close to a good deal of it. They contain an exhaustive account of the 20th century epidemics of asbestos- and silica-related diseases in South African mines – mandatory reading for those who care about the health and welfare of men who work in mines. The publication of his nearly completed book about migrant workers in the mines is expected to provide a new stimulus for us all. The broad outlines of the diseases and accidents associated with the coal mines in South Wales are well known to many but much of the detail is not. Until relatively recently, the same was true of asbestos and gold mining in South Africa.

Scientists working in the relevant fields will remember Jock as an important ally in opening up the hidden disasters around the mining and milling of asbestos, and the failure of dust control in the gold mines. Those of us who worked in jobs which were, to a greater or lesser degree, 'ruled' by individuals or groups that were not really interested in the fate of workers in the very dusty asbestos mills or at the silica-rich rock face, will regret his passing. His role in exploring the stored material at the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), which proved to be a gold mine in its own right, cannot be overstated.

About 1996 I received an email from Jock, of whom I had never heard. He asked if he could have access to the material held by the National Centre for Occupational Health (now the NIOH). The answer was of course, "at any time". The NCOH data was already being used to prepare the case against Cape Asbestos, and the same access was granted to the legal team defending Cape Asbestos. Jock and I began what became one of the longest conversations in my career with anyone outside South Africa. I never ceased to wonder at the energy and determination that went with his expertise and capacity for hard work over long periods of time. We spent many hours discussing mining in this country and the resources of the NIOH.

My personal history had primed me, at an early age, for Jock's research proposal. On the mantelpiece in our lounge in Kensington, Johannesburg, stood a piece of rock from a mine in the Northern Cape. It consisted of country rock, separating seams of bright blue fibre. My mother told me that my father (a mining engineer) had come back from a trip to the Northern Cape in the 1930s, picking at this piece of rock. When asked what he was doing, he replied that "this is what is killing the miners".

Jock's academic base (RMIT) provided his background in history, sociology, politics and ideology, and he brought this refreshing mixture with him to South Africa. For anyone who seeks insight into the demise of the asbestos industry in South Africa *Asbestos Blues: Labour, capital, physicians and the state* is an unbeatable primer. It is a product of the first years of Jock's research in this country, begun in the latter half of the 1990s and published in 2002. It is divided into 10 chapters, covering a wide field, followed by an index to more than 70 books, theses and monographs, a list of

more than 50 references, and a comprehensive index to the text. I have found it a reference work of great value.

In the conclusion to *Asbestos Blues*, Jock sets out the development of knowledge about the dangers of fibre-containing dust, the repeated failures to publish the truth, and the legacy that the industry would leave to the country and the world. Read Chapter 10 first – seven pages of carefully arranged facts that are an indictment of the industry and South Africa.

Jock McCulloch was not a loner. The second book on my shelf is written with Geoffrey Tweedale, a long-time colleague, titled *Defending the Indefensible: The global asbestos industry and its fight for survival*. It is packed with information and stories that might upset the reader. Read the seven pages at the end of the book headed 'sources and acknowledgements'; they will whet your appetite for some stirring stuff.

I am fortunate in that I have been exposed, throughout my life, to women and men of exceptional quality. Jock is one of those. I think it was he who told me that the success of the case against Cape Asbestos would open the path to the gold mining industry, and so it proved. The third book on my shelf is *South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis*. It opens with the following paragraph, paraphrased from an address by the then President of the Chamber of Mines, KW Maxwell, at the Chamber's 100th Annual General Meeting in 1990 on the eve of majority rule: "Per capita disposable income was falling and more than five million South Africans were unemployed. Half of the adult population was illiterate and half of the country's children were not attending school. South Africa had just 60 000 students in technical and higher education. With half the population, Australia had over 800 000". Against this sombre background, an account of the development, and the current situation in South Africa's gold mines, was evidently not going to be a simple task.

"South Africa's modern history lies at the convergence of two colonial systems, the British and the Dutch. Its transformation from a rural society to an industrial state at the end of the 19th century was accelerated by the discovery of diamonds near Kimberley in 1867 and gold at Johannesburg in 1886. It is a story of late colonial conquest, mineral wealth and the persistence of racial ideologies which came to be embodied in apartheid." By the time this book was published, the major gold mining companies in South Africa were faced with massive class actions by former mine workers. The history set out in this book may help South Africans who find it difficult to approve the resort to the courts in order to remedy the neglect of damaging occupational exposure for so many workers over such a long period of time. It is not an easy read so, once again, I suggest that the concluding seven pages be read first.

There is every reason for those of us who work, or worked, at the NIOH, to remember Jock McCulloch with respect and affection, and as a disciplined and honest researcher. By reading his books we can reinforce our efforts to improve working conditions in this mineral-rich country."

Tony Davies

Former Director of the (now) National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), and Wits Emeritus Professor



*Jock McCulloch:
scholar, teacher, loyal friend, and a man of fierce determination and
deep concern for social justice*

"It was with great sadness that I received the news of Jock's death. I can't remember exactly when I first met him but it was Professor Tony Davies who brought Jock to the museum when he was in South Africa on a research trip. Both Tony and Jock taught me an inestimable amount about miners' lung disease and specifically asbestos-related disease.

Through the years I corresponded with Jock who assisted with enquiries received from researchers, critiquing and adding to the texts of exhibitions I edited for the Adler Museum (researched by Emeritus Professor Tony Cantrell and Jemima Cantrell), and researched for the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), and with reviewing articles submitted for publication in the Adler Museum Bulletin. Incidentally, the Adler Museum exhibition included two fine photographs taken by Jock during the course of his research in South Africa.

From time to time, Jock sought information from the archives of the Adler Museum for his research. Our last exchange was in 2017 regarding an article he was writing on AJ Orenstein which, as one would assume, showed him in a most unfavourable light. He was keen to change the name of the eponymous lecture (AJ Orenstein Memorial Lecture) arranged annually by the Adler Museum. He himself had delivered this lecture in 2013, entitled 'Dust, Disease and Politics on South Africa's Gold Mines.' It was a truly riveting lecture, and was subsequently published in the June 2013 issue of the Adler Museum Bulletin (Vol. 39 [1]).

Jock knew that I had been at the Johannesburg Art Gallery for 25 years before joining the Adler Museum and he shared with me photographs of artworks he had acquired or had enjoyed seeing. Fine art was an area that he had studied and with which he constantly engaged. We also exchanged views about the state of cricket in the world, 'bet' on who would win the Ashes and other series, and enjoyed swapping unusual collective nouns!

I feel sad that Jock is no longer on this earth. I will miss his sharp mind, his compassion and his brilliant sense of humour a lot. I feel privileged to have known him."

*Rochelle Keene, Former Curator, Adler Museum of
Medicine (2004 – 2015),
Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg*

"We ... are so sorry to read the news of Jock ... (he) was held in high esteem by our organisation and he was certainly a gifted person. The world has lost a truly wonderful human being he will be sadly missed by all ... "

*Vicki Hamilton, CEO/Secretary,
Asbestos Council of Victoria*

"Meeting Jock in 2014 was a deeply moving experience for me. As a mesothelioma widow, I greatly appreciated his passion, insight, and talent as an author and educator. His vast work such as *Defending the Indefensible: The global asbestos industry and its fight for survival*; *Asbestos Blues: Labour, capital, physicians & the state in South Africa*; and *Asbestos: Its Human Cost*, have been monumentally important to me and the global fight to ban asbestos. He was strong when we talked in June about him being recognised with the 2018 ADAO Dr Irving Selikoff Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding contributions for truth and justice."

*Linda Reinstein, President/CEO, Asbestos Disease
Awareness Organization (ADAO)*

My own memories of Jock are of a kind and caring man, deeply committed to the 'cause' of asbestos and the immense suffering that so many people experienced after being exposed to the deadly fibre. I can imagine him walking across the veld of the Northern Cape asbestos fields, witnessing the scarred landscape and the ubiquitous scatterings of grey tufts of crocidolite. It is something that I and many others who worked at the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) and affiliated organisations also, naively, did. Sadly, some, like Jock, subsequently developed mesothelioma. The legacies of Dr Derick Rendall, Dr GK Sluis-Cremer, Dr Jack Abramowitz, Mr Joas Kubayi, and others, live on in their valuable contributions to asbestos-related research. May they all rest in peace.

*Gill Nelson,
Editor-in-Chief, Occupational Health Southern Africa*