

Jon (Jock) O'Connell

Courtesy of Staff News, 26 June, 1992

Some 150 friends and colleagues paid tribute to Jon (Jock) O'Connell at an open-air gathering to honour his life at Canberra's Federal Golf Club last Tuesday.

They joined family members in the tribute, in chilling winds by towering gums and a half-mast Australian flag.

Jon died at home in Canberra on 18 June after a short illness.

Born at Tamworth, NSW, in 1945, Jon came to Canberra as a schoolboy with his parents, Terry (after whom the O'Connell Education Centre at Griffith is named) and Nancy, and his sister, Jenny. He lived in the then outer suburb of O'Connor and attended the Lyneham High School.

After completing secondary schooling with both academic and sporting success, Jon went on to the ANU to graduate as Bachelor of Arts in 1967. In this latter period, he perfected his flair as raconteur, demonstrated some prowess as a nippy half at Rugby Union and widened his repertoire of rugby songs.

He joined the Department of Immigration in January 1968 as a graduate clerk. However, shortly after his appointment, he was "called up" for National Service in April 1968, and distinguished himself by being named outstanding soldier in recruit training. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant from the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, and posted to New Guinea as an infantry platoon commander with the Pacific Islands Regiment.

Jon was first posted overseas with the Department to Colombo in November 1970 as a single man and it was there he met his wife Kleo at rehearsal for an amateur dramatic group. The couple married in Athens in May 1973.

Further postings, to London in 1974, Buenos Aires in 1975 and Manchester in 1984, followed.

Between postings, Jon served in many of the policy and operational areas of the Department. Some of the more interesting projects he worked on were the first National Population Inquiry (the Borrie Report) and the development of Australia's first structured migrant assessment system, "NUMAS".

Since 1982, while in Canberra, Jon was mainly involved in business migration and visited Hong Kong and the North Asia region on a number of occasions on short-term missions while monitoring and fine-tuning the Department's business migration policy and operations. He was heavily involved in the establishment of the new Business Skills Category.

Jon was a great family man, a lover of fine wines and haute cuisine, a sometime chef, enjoyed the odd anecdote (remember his stories of Jean Claude?), could hold a tune, was a bit of a Thespian and adored his rounds of golf.

Although most colleagues remember Jon as gregarious and outgoing, he was also very caring and thoughtful. He was well read, had views on all social issues and possessed a questioning approach to all aspects of his work and life.

He was committed to any project he undertook and his wise counsel will be sadly missed by his very wide group of friends and colleagues. He was a special person who was loved by many and disliked by none.

Our heartfelt condolences go to his wife Kleo, daughter Vanda and son James.