

OBITUARY:

PROFESSOR JEFF BINDON: MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

26 December 1938 – 15 October 2016



It is with deep sadness that we inform the university community of the passing of Professor Jeff Bindon, who has been a part of this university for the past 47 years, on 15 October 2016.

Jeff Bindon completed his schooling at Pretoria Boys High School before entering the University of Pretoria where he obtained his BScEng. After gaining experience at the South African Railways he decided to study further overseas and entered Imperial College in London where he completed his Masters in Engineering, and then his PhD in 1970. In the latter research he was amongst the pioneering researchers developing computer code for predicting flow behaviour; a process we now take for granted.

He returned to South Africa and joined the University of Natal as a Senior Lecturer in Thermodynamics and Turbomachinery, involving himself in research on hydrogen combustion and turbomachinery, in particular. He retired (for the first time) as an Associate Professor in 1998. He remained based in Mechanical Engineering and was asked to return to the academic staff in 2008 as the School was going through a staffing crisis. Throughout this period he was active in developing technology kits to assist young folk to experiment, measure and explore via

the medium of constructing small machines. These items deliberately relied on the use of household materials and only required simple hand tools. The clear intention was to bring technology within reach of all. He continued lecturing until the end of 2012 before returning fulltime to his engineering education interests.

In early October he travelled to Stellenbosch where he was running short courses for school children. On the 15th he went hiking with a group on Helderberg, where he collapsed, to the shock and disbelief of his colleagues when they received the news.

Jeff was an exceptional teacher with the ability to make his field, Thermodynamics, both intelligible and interesting to his students. These two aspects do not always go together. He was also a very practical person as could be seen in the equipment he developed for teaching in the laboratories, all of which were heavily instrumented. The area in which he really excelled was engineering education aimed at raising the awareness of young people of the possibilities of a career in the field of engineering. He worked tirelessly at producing and distributing kits of various types, the most popular one being that of his unique Steam Car. Many thousands of these have been built in South Africa and overseas over the last 22 years. In 2005 the South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering recognised his contribution by a special award for his efforts in promoting Engineering to young people.

As an extension to his educational kits Jeff started running a Mechanical Engineering “Magic” show. With time these demonstrations became larger, more spectacular, and noisier. They were immensely popular and became a feature of many technology events around the country. His colleagues were usually the first to be exposed to his new ideas with loud “Bangs” often rattling tea cups in the staff room. In addition to this technology outreach, Jeff designed and patented other engineering devices such as a swimming pool Chlorinator which was popular in SA for a number of years.

His trademark unruly hair and slightly irascible manner (carefully cultivated) made him a popular and insightful contributor to any discussion. He will be sadly missed – the common-room won’t be the same without him.

The funeral service for Prof Jeff Bindon will take place on Thursday 27 October at 10h00 at the Westville Baptist Church, 2 Church Place, Westville.

Obituary by Professors GDJ Smith & LW Roberts