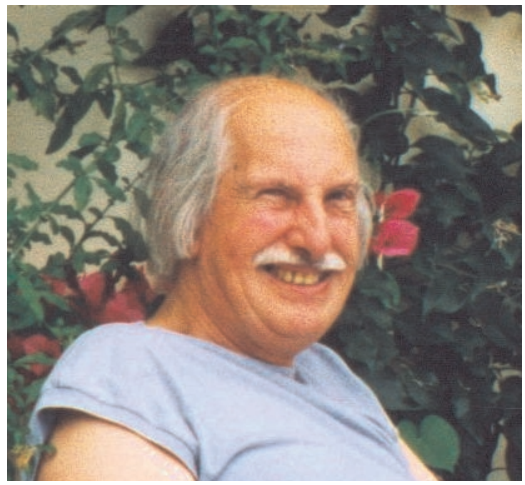
Jake Hancock 1928–2004



John Michael Hancock – known universally as Jake within the geological community – was born on 10 August 1928 in Salisbury, Wiltshire, on which basis he always regarded himself as a countryman. Childhood in Salisbury was followed by secondary education at Dauntsey's School, Market Lavington, where, unusually, he was able to take Higher Schools Geology. Richard St. John Lambert (1928–1992, later to become a distinguished Precambrian worker and isotope geologist) was a fellow pupil, and, following National Service in 1947–1949, the two went up to Cambridge together to read geology. Hancock was an undergraduate at Queens' College, gaining a B.A. in geology and petrology in 1952. It was at Cambridge that he met a further life-long friend, Michael House (1930–2002, who was to become a Devonian stratigrapher and ammonoid worker of international repute, and sometime Professor of Geology at Hull and Southampton Universities).

Both Salisbury and Dauntsey's School are built on chalk, and it was the Chalk in all its aspects – from mineralogy to palaeontology – that was to become his abiding interest. He began research at Cambridge under the guidance of Maurice Black (1904–1973), with the marginal facies of the British Chalk as the subject. This study involved extensive fieldwork, by bicycle, in England, Northern Ireland, and the Western Isles of Scotland. A particular feature of this work was the investigation of the heavy minerals of these sediments, and detrital mineralogy was an abiding interest.

Offered an Assistant Lectureship at King's College, London in 1955, he completed his doctorate in 1957 (in which year he was appointed to a full Lectureship), and progressed to Senior Lecturer in 1970, and Reader in 1977. Following the closure of the King's Department of Geology in the early 80s, he joined the staff at Imperial College in 1986, and was awarded a Professorship that same year; retiring in 1993, he continued to teach at Imperial for the next decade. At the time of his death, aged 75, on 4 March 2004, he was planning that year's lectures, on Cretaceous sea level changes.

The Cretaceous dominated his research interests, which encompassed refinement of biostratigraphic subdivision and intercontinental correlation, clarification of ammonite taxonomy as an aid to biostratigraphy, regional stratigraphic studies (his work in Northern Ireland and in Norfolk (with Norman Peake) are classics), facies patterns, and sea-level changes. But it is his work on the Chalk that is most memorable, building on that of his old supervisor Maurice Black, and providing the foundation for that of his students.

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Initially curiosity-driven, the work was to take on an economic perspective with the discovery that chalk was a major hydrocarbon reservoir in the North Sea. Hancock worked as a consultant in the industry, and contributed to numerous training courses (notably with JAPEC). His contribution to research was recognized by the award of the Lyell Medal of the Geological Society in 1989.

Hancock taught across the field of geology, not merely regional geology, stratigraphy and palaeontology, and, while at King's he ran the practical classes in igneous and metamorphic petrology, as a complement to lectures by Wally Pitcher, Bob Howie and others: he joined the Mineralogical Society in 1976. His contributions to geology went far beyond teaching and research. He served as Field Meetings Secretary, Senior Vice President and President (1985–1989) of the Geologists' Association, as Secretary, Treasurer and Vice-President of the Palaeontological Association (1967–1978), and again as Treasurer (1999–2004). He served on the Councils of the Geological Society, Systematics Association and Palaeontological Society, and on numerous committees of The Natural Environment Research Council, Royal Society, and a range of International Commissions, and as a *Treatise on Invertebrate Palaeontology* adviser.

Beyond this was a life-long commitment to education (he was for many years active as a teacher and administrator for the Working Men's College), and, latterly, to the relationship between geology and wine, as manifest in the field and glass; he was a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Wine Research* from 1989 up until his death. The cultivation and conservation of rare and threatened potato varieties was another passion.

Jake Hancock was a geological institution. His distinctive profile, extraordinary laugh, habit of sleeping through lectures (usually audibly), and thereafter asking the first, pertinent question, were hallmarks recognized internationally. He was also a kind and generous man, paying journal subscriptions for colleagues in the East before the collapse of Communism, and supporting them on precious visits to the West, when he and Ray Parish, his partner of 42 years, wined, dined and encouraged generations of young (and not so young) geologists.

W.J. KENNEDY

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