

Sistemazione and death: the role of the Wittenoom asbestos mine in the lives and deaths of Italian transnational workers

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis has been wholly written by me, except where due acknowledgement has been made. The work has not been submitted, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. Ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

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Timeline of Significant Events Related to the Asbestos Industry in Western Australian

- 1885** The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) is founded.
- 1922** Asbestos is included in 'An Index to Health Hazards in Industry', a Commonwealth of Australia Department of Health publication.
- 1930** Publication by E. R. A. Merewether and C. W. Price 'Report on the Effects of Asbestos Dust on the Lungs and Dust Suppression in the British Asbestos Industry.
- 1932** Publication by J. V. Sparks, 1932, 'Pulmonary Asbestosis', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, (March).
- 1935** Departments of Health and Labour and Industry correspondence on the ill-health of four employees at the Asbestos Works of Messrs James Hardie & Co. Ltd., Rivervale, Western Australia. Merewether's report mentioned.
- 1943** Transfer of the Wittenoom mining leases from Archibald Maynard Wright and Langley George Hancock to Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, CSR's subsidiary.
- 1944** ABA Limited Engineer Keith Osborne Brown's report to CSR on his visit to Wittenoom and Yampire mines. Yampire is no more dusty than ABA Limited's Wittenoom mine.
- 1945** Inspector of Mines Adams reports on the dust menace at Wittenoom and the lack of experience of the ABA Limited staff in asbestos mining.
- 1946** Asbestosis is reported in Wittenoom's mill manager.
- 1948** Report from the Government Chemical Laboratories to the West Australian Commissioner for Public Health warning about the asbestos hazard. CSR's Malcolm King visits South African blue asbestos mines.
- 1950** July Medical Journal of Australia publishes Dr Smith's report on the Australian Medical Congress of May-June, 1950. Smith draws attention to the occurrence of pulmonary carcinoma in workers exposed to asbestos, chromatics and arsenic.
- 1951** Under Secretary for Mines receives a memo from Dr Linley Henzell. It contains a description of the symptoms of asbestosis.
- c. 1955** The Commissioner for Public Health argues that the Health Department should have more say in the monitoring and implementing of safety measures in the mining industry.
- 1958** The Professor of Pathology at Perth Hospital, R. E. J. ten Seldan, informs Health Commissioner Henzell that the number of asbestosis and carcinoma cases will increase in the next ten years among Wittenoom workers due to the appalling conditions.
- 1959** C. Wagner presents a paper on mesothelioma to the Johannesburg Conference, South Africa.

- 1960** C. Wagner publishes a paper on the high incidence of mesothelioma in a South African mining community from occupational and environmental contact.
- Report of the Commissioner for Public Health for 1959 presented to both Houses of the Western Australian Parliament. The length of exposure of workers contracting asbestosis is much shorter than comparably employed men in the gold mining industry and the extent of the disease is greater.
- Wittenoom mine manager Ozzie Allan sends extracts from the British Medical Journal of 30th April 1960: 'Complications of Asbestosis' to ABA Ltd, Perth and General Manager, Sydney. In the article Dr Hugh-Jones discusses asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.
- 1962** Dr James McNulty publishes paper on the first case of mesothelioma in an ex-Wittenoom worker who died in 1960.
- 1963** CSR correspondence on Industrial disease at Wittenoom.
- 1966** December CSR announces the closure of the Wittenoom mine for financial reasons.
- 1974** Bulletin article on Wittenoom. CSR instructs Malcolm King, CSR senior executive, to commence collection of all documents relating to Wittenoom blue asbestos mine. He collects 20,000 documents.
- 1977** CSR decides secretly to use the limited legal liability of its subsidiary, Midalco Pty Ltd (formerly ABA Limited), to avoid payment of damages claims in future common law cases arising from asbestos exposure among Wittenoom victims.
- 1988** CSR's secret strategy leaked to journalist Michael Gill.
- 1989** Successful Class action against CSR by 300 ex-Wittenoom workers and their carers.
Western Australian Researchers produce future predictions for cases of ARDs among Wittenoom workers.

Glossary of Terms

adit	mine entrance
barista	Barman able to operate the commercial machine for making espresso coffee
crib	lunch
extra-comunitari	illegal immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe
Guardia di Finanza	Italian Military Police who deal with infringements relating to income tax and Customs
mezzadria	tenant farming, share cropping
mezzadri	tenant farmers, share croppers
miseria	poverty
paesano	fellow townspeople (feminine form is paesana; paesani and paesane are the masculine and feminine plural forms)
scuole medie	junior high school
signor	Mr
sistemato	established (feminine form is sistemata; sistemati and sistemate are the masculine and feminine plural forms)
sistemazione	a notion symbolised by the aspiration to escape <i>la miseria</i> , realize home and/or land ownership, find permanent, well-paid work, marry, establish a family and create a future for their children
stope	a working area in Wittenoorm mine from where ore was excavated
vermigliani	people from the town of Vermiglio, in the Trentino Alto Adige region of Italy
Wittenoorm Italian:	For the purpose of this thesis I use this term when talking about participants or their family members who were in Wittenoorm. I do not mean to infer that this is how these people generally define themselves
zoccole	wooden shoes

List of Abbreviations

ABA	Australian Blue Asbestos
ADSA	Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (Perth)
ARD	asbestos-related disease
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investment Commission
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Company
MRCF	Medical Research and Compensation Foundation
SGIO	State Government Insurance Office
WACR	Western Australian Cancer Registry
p. p. c. c.	particles per cubic centimetre

The Participants

I provide here a brief profile of the research participants who worked or lived in Wittenoom or are surviving family members of deceased Wittenoom residents. Where they are related I have arranged them in family groups.

Belintende, Ezio

He arrived in Perth in 1952. Belintende found out about Wittenoom as he walked by the ABA Ltd office which advertised work there. After a medical, he went to Wittenoom to work as a miner, but lasted only a month due to a mining accident. He made two trips to Western Australia and worked in several different jobs before returning permanently to Italy in the late 1950s to marry.

Bevacqua, Giacomo

He went to Wittenoom in 1959, where he initially worked as a miner. In the early 1960s during a brief visit to Perth he met a *paesana*, Lidia who had recently arrived from Italy. They married and decided to return to Wittenoom. In 1964 they took over the Single Men's mess and stayed until Wittenoom's closure was announced in 1966. They returned to Tortorici, Sicily but found attitudes had not changed and returned to Perth.

Bonomi, Cecilia (nee Bevilacqua) and **Bonomi, Andrew** are mother and son.

Cecilia was married to **Mario Bonomi**.

Cecilia arrived in Wittenoom in 1953, the year after her husband, Mario, who was working there as a miner. They had three sons while in Wittenoom. Andrew is their firstborn. They left the town in 1961 after Mario was seriously injured in a mining accident. They settled in Perth and a few years later moved to Bullsbrook where they ran a dairy farm. Mario died from mesothelioma in 1982.

Casella, Antonio

He heard about Wittenoom from a friend in 1966. Antonio arrived there in September to work as a miner. By then CSR had already decided to close the mine but waited until December to announce their decision. During his adult life, Antonio undertook more study. Among his many achievements Antonio has a PhD and has published several books.¹

¹ I learned about Antonio Casella from Dr Susanna Iuliano. She introduced me to him and also provided me with the transcripts of the interview she had conducted with him in 2005.

Del Casale, Paolo

He worked as a miner in Wittenoom in 1960 for eight months. He is from the seaside town of Vasto in the Abruzzo region. Twenty of his fellow townspeople have died from an asbestos-related disease from their time at Wittenoom, including one of Paolo's brothers.

Della Maddalena, Arturo

He arrived from Italy as an 18 year old in 1962. A few weeks later, his brother Wally, who was later to die from an asbestos-related disease, took him to Wittenoom. He worked in the mill and eventually became a mill supervisor. Arturo loved the lifestyle and stayed there until the mine's closure. 13 of Arturos' *paesani* have died of an asbestos-related disease.

Favero, Umberto and Uculano, Venera

Umberto went to Wittenoom in 1961. He was a productive miner, one year earning even more than the mine's manager. He met and settled down with Venera Uculano who arrived in 1963 to work as ABA Limited's secretary. The couple fell in love with the lifestyle in the outback. They remained in Wittenoom until 2002, at which time they returned to Perth. Umberto passed away in 2011.

Giannasi, Valentina is the mother of **Alvaro** and **Lidia (Nellini)**. Valentina was married to **Bruno Giannasi**

Bruno Giannasi arrived in Australia in 1960 and went to Wittenoom not long after. His family had stayed in Italy. Bruno's wife, Valentina, was desperate to have her family reunited and in 1962 Bruno sponsored her and the children, Alvaro and Lidia, to come to Wittenoom. The children speak fondly of their life there, as Valentina ran a boarding house and their father worked in the mill. They remained until the Easter of 1966. Bruno was already displaying signs of asbestosis at the time of their departure. He died in 1988 from complications associated with the disease.

Guagnin, Lea and **Valvasori, Fulvia** are mother and daughter. Lea was married to **Egizio Guagnin**.

Egizio and Lea Guagnin wanted to earn enough money to start a business. In 1957 after Egizio heard about Wittenoom, he, Lea and their three and a half year old daughter, Fulvia, went there for six months. Egizio worked as a miner while Lea looked after Fulvia. On their return they purchased the East Perth Supply Store. Egizio died from mesothelioma in 2006.

Martino, Tony and Gina are the parents of **Rosemary, Susan, Michael, Julie** and **Noelle**.

The family arrived in Wittenoom in 1963 and remained until the beginning of 1967, when they returned to Perth. They would lose two of their children as a result of their time in Wittenoom: Rosemary died unexpectedly in Wittenoom from peritonitis in 1965. Michael died from mesothelioma in 2002 at the age of 42. He had played in the asbestos tailings as a child. As an adult, Michael became a motor mechanic. He worked for others, and, for a time, was also self-employed.

Martino, Maria is the wife of the late **Michael Martino**. **Jayson** and **Daniel** are two of their sons.

In November 2010 Maria Martino agreed to tell her late husband Michael's story. She described, albeit with great difficulty, Michael Martino's agonising death from mesothelioma in June 2002. Their sons Jayson, Daniel and Giordan were eleven, eight and four years of age. Daniel, in particular, found it difficult to listen to his mother retell his father's story and had left the room. Two days later, he met with me to find out about my research.

Micheloni, Attilio

He arrived in Wittenoom in 1952 and worked there for eight months. Subsequently Attilio worked in several other Australian mines. He went back and forth to Italy to visit his mother in Ponte in Valtellina in Lombardy. He eventually repatriated in the 1990s to his home town and married.

Mirandola, Nazzarena. She was married to the late **Gino Selle**.

The couple had migrated to Australia in the late 1950s, settling in Perth, until Gino heard about Wittenoom. They sold their Morley Park home in 1962 and moved up to the mining town with their two Australian-born daughters, Katia and Carla. Gino worked as a carpenter and Nazzarena opened up a boarding house. They stayed for two years and then travelled around Australia for six months before repatriating to Verona, Italy in 1965. Gino died in 2008 from an ischaemia.

Oprandi, Francesco and **Emilia** are brother and sister. They are the children of the late **Attilio Oprandi** and **Caterina Bellini**.

Attilio was a member of the first group of recruited Lombard miners to arrive at Wittenoom in February 1951. He left Wittenoom after several months, appalled with the conditions. In 1955 his family, wife Caterina and four year old son, Francesco, joined him in Coolgardie where he was working in the gold mines. Francesco and Emilia

shared their father's memories of Italy and Wittenoom and their family's *sistemazione* in Bullsbrook, Western Australia. Attilio Oprandi died in 2002.

Panizza, Pio and Miriam are husband and wife.

Pio is the nephew of Attilio Slanzi who was in the second group of Wittenoom recruits which arrived from Vermiglio in the Trentino Alto Adige in April 1951. Pio, on his uncle's advice, went to Wittenoom in 1959 to take advantage of the high earnings on offer. He lasted about 9 months, but left after a mining accident. He worked in the timber cutting industry in Wundowie and started a trucking business with a Greek partner. In 1965 he married his *paesana*, Miriam who had arrived from Italy after his marriage proposal. They remained in Western Australia until the mid 1960s, when they repatriated to the Trentino Alto Adige.

Ranieri, Assunta (Sue) is the wife of the late Toni Ranieri.

Toni Ranieri went to Wittenoom between 1957 and 1960, and again in 1961 after his marriage to Sue in order to earn money to reduce their mortgage. Toni was widely recognized as the best miner during his time in Wittenoom. He was young and spent his hard won earnings on gambling and drink. Once he married, he displayed the same work ethic he had demonstrated in Wittenoom to establish two successful businesses with his wife, Sue. It is thanks to Toni Ranieri that many photographs of life in Wittenoom exist.

Scandella, Severino is the son of the late Evaristo Scandella.

Severino Scandella has never been to Australia. His father, Evaristo, was a member of the first group of Lombard miners which arrived in 1951. Severino shared what he knew of his father's memories of life in Italy, Wittenoom and after his repatriation to Italy. He is one of the co-authors of his village's migration history: *Vidi altre terre, altre beltà: Ma la mia patria... Immagini e ricordi di emigranti finesi*.²

Rodigari, Tullio and Nesa, Lina

Tullio went to Wittenoom in 1952 and worked there as an electrician in the mill until 1958. He then repatriated to Italy where he married Lina Nesa and settled in his native Montagna in Valtellina in Lombardy. He is a fellow townsman of Arturo and the late Wally Della Maddalena.

Santini, Giulio

Giulio went to Wittenoom in 1960, where he worked for nine months. During his return to Perth on holidays he met Graziella. They married and Giulio decided to remain

² Covelli, G., et al. (1993), *Vidi altre terre, altre beltà: Ma la mia patria... Immagini e ricordi di emigranti finesi*, ed. Tito Terzi (Clusone, Bergamo: Ferrari Editrice). Trans: I saw other lands other beauty but my homeland: images and memories of emigrants from Fino del Monte. Unless otherwise stated, I have translated any Italian titles or Italian texts which are cited in this thesis.

in Perth. He worked with Alcoa, at Kwinana for most of his working life.

Tagliaferri, Lina and Scali, Maria are mother and daughter.

Lina was married to Beppe, another member of the first group of Lombard miners to go to Wittenoom in February 1951. Lina and Maria followed eight months later. In 1954 their son Carlo was born. The family remained in Wittenoom until 1957, when Beppe had become very ill and needed hospitalization in Perth. The family settled there permanently. In 1983 Beppe died of respiratory complications from asbestosis.

Tamburri, Rosa is the wife of the late **Mario Tamburri**.

In 1958 newly wed Rosa followed husband Mario to Wittenoom. Several members on both sides of the family also went there. They remained three years and finally settled in Perth. Mario died from mesothelioma in 1982.

Vincenzo Ubaldi³

He arrived in Wittenoom in 1963 with his brother. He worked in the mill for six or seven months. He was young and enjoyed the relaxed lifestyle he had found in Wittenoom. His brother's accident, however, prompted their departure. In 1966 Vincenzo accompanied a mate who was driving to Wittenoom in his newly-acquired car. He then stayed until the mine's closure.

³ I have used a pseudonym as the participant wishes to remain anonymous.

Abstract

This doctoral thesis records the social history of the Wittenoom Italians, using oral histories, available photographs, archival material and the Motley Rice papers obtained in the course of legal discovery. The intent of this project is to give these Italians a voice and recognize their contribution and sacrifices, which benefited Australia's economic growth in the post-war period. This thesis explores their lives in the context of transnational migration, the mining of asbestos, and the roles of CSR and the regulatory authorities in the management of the mine and the accumulating knowledge internationally on asbestos-related diseases.

To provide the context for this thesis, Chapter One introduces several themes, some of which will be taken up again in the body of the thesis. It outlines the nature of asbestos-related diseases and provides a brief history of CSR and the Wittenoom mine (including its operation, personnel and industrial process). It goes on to discuss the failure of the global asbestos industry (of which Wittenoom was a part) to self-regulate in its pursuit of profits. Finally it provides an overview of asbestos litigation in Australia involving CSR and the James Hardie Company.

In Chapter Two I discuss my methodological approach which has been akin to a social historian or detective work. My approach differed in that I am an insider. Being a child of Italian migrants, I speak Italian and have considerable familiarity with several dialects. This connection facilitated my rapport with participants. I combine an oral history approach with the use of photographs, my own archival searches and the Motley Rice papers. To understand the Wittenoom Italians' motives for coming to Australia, one of my requests to participants was to speak about life in Italy.

Chapter Three contextualises the participants' stories about life in Italy within a brief discussion of Italy and Australia's complementary migration objectives after World War 2. Italy needed to offload her millions of unemployed, and Australia wanted to increase her population to fill the jobs created as a result of National Development Scheme; the

Wittenoom mine was part of this national development. Desperate to find work; 1,102 Italians, many with their families, went to Wittenoom during the 1950s and 1960s.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, the men, women and children, in turn, talk about their lives in Wittenoom. The children's accounts, most notably in the boys' stories, suggest that generally they enjoyed the lifestyle and freedoms which they had never before experienced. The men and women speak of their first impressions, the working and living conditions, the gambling and drinking, their lack of knowledge about ARDs, their re-creation of important rites of passage and rituals along with other efforts to make do in the hostile, but equally beautiful environment. In order to establish the foundations for *sistemazione*, mainly Italians with families remained for much longer periods than the typical four months.

Chapter Seven outlines the various pathways the adults took to achieve or consolidate their own *sistemazione*, as well as that of their children. The next chapter records the consequences of asbestos exposure, particularly asbestosis and mesothelioma, years after participants' family members or friends had left Wittenoom. Several participants voiced the health fears they hold for their family members and themselves.

Chapter Nine is based on documents from CSR/ABA Limited and the Departments of Mines and Health supplied by the North American legal firm of Motley Rice. From these it has been possible to reconstruct the conflicting and sometimes ambivalent positions of the various public players in the Wittenoom tragedy. This led to delays in decisions regarding occupational health and safety issues as the to-ing and fro-ing inherent in the written discussions continued to the detriment of the workers; delays which CSR used to its advantage. The documents also permit the piecing together of when government departments and CSR became aware of the dangers of ARDs. CSR's own negligence and lack of duty of care are confirmed in their strategy planning in the 1970s, as senior executives responded to the media attention on Wittenoom and ARDS in anticipation of future litigation. Until this evidence entered the public domain, CSR would thwart the attempts of early victims to obtain damages.

Introduction

This thesis traces the history of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine in Western Australia from the perspective of the Italian miners and their families who went there during the 1950s and 1960s. More broadly, it examines the role of Italian migrants in Australia's post-war economic growth, the role of CSR (the owner of the mine from the mid 1940s) and state authorities in the management of what proved to be a dangerous workplace, and an exploration of the costs and challenges of occupational and environmental exposure to asbestos, a known carcinogen. The thesis draws on two bodies of literature: the history of the Italian diaspora and the history of asbestos mining and asbestos-related diseases. In terms of primary sources, the thesis is based on interviews with ex-miners, their families, Italians who remained in Italy and several other players in the Wittenoom scenario, the Motley Rice papers (these comprise CSR/ABA documents, Departments of Mines and Health files and other documents relating to asbestos mining and asbestos-related diseases), photographs and other archival sources.

This study began as a Linkage Project funded by the Australian Research Council. Additional funding and in kind support were received from the Italian Australian Institute in Melbourne. There were several different options for the doctoral candidate to choose from in undertaking this research. Among them were a study of the medico-legal ramifications of asbestos exposure in light of the scientific knowledge on asbestos-related diseases available to CSR, state authorities in Western Australia and the Commonwealth government; the reconstruction of a social history of Italian workers (the largest migrant group to go to Wittenoom) in the context of transnational migration and the mining of blue asbestos; or a study of CSR's role in the development of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine within the context of the global asbestos industry. My Italian background, fluency in Italian and counselling experience led me to focus on reconstructing a social history of the Italian Wittenoom workers and their families.

My interest in undertaking this research stems from the importance of giving the Italians who went to Wittenoom in the 1950s and 1960s a voice; in order to record their

exploitation, disproportionate contributions and sacrifices in the development of the Wittenoom mine from their perspective. My interest had, however, also been sparked because I am a child of post-war Italian migrants. Conducting this research would be a way of revisiting and vicariously reframing and recording my own family's social history, which mirrors that of the participants in this research in so many ways.

Both my grandfathers were typical of early twentieth century Italian emigrants in search of work to escape the hardships they faced. My maternal grandfather immigrated to North America as an adolescent after the death of his mother. During his absence all but one of his siblings died. Subsequently his surviving brother was killed in World War 1. Meanwhile my paternal grandfather went to South America on at least two occasions to bring much needed money to support his family of seven children and my grandmother; six other children died from various illnesses prevalent in the early 1900s. Eventually both my grandfathers repatriated to Sicily, in contrast to my parents who migrated to Australia permanently.

My father came to Australia in the early 1950s. He had responded to Australian government circulars placed on the walls of his village advertising work opportunities, leaving behind his young wife and eighteen month old daughter. His plan was to work hard for two years, save enough money for their *sistemazione* and then return home to his family. Yet like many other Italians, he decided opportunities were much better in Australia. My mother and sister joined him there eighteen months later. Four years later my parents had two more children: I was born within two years of my mother's arrival, followed twenty months later by my brother. My family's narrative contains many of the experiences found in the stories of the Wittenoom Italians: working in dirty industries, having to work second jobs and overtime; experiencing racism; and having little recourse to help when treated unjustly, among others.

In recording the sacrifices and contributions made by the Wittenoom Italians, this research has allowed me indirectly to acknowledge those of my parents. My family's migration experiences have been much more fortunate in contrast to those of the Italians who endured exploitation and tragedy as a result of having worked or lived in Wittenoom. The Italians who went to Wittenoom (and for that matter my parents) had no knowledge of

the health dangers associated with exposure to asbestos, despite what was already known by the 1950s about asbestos-related diseases

The earliest recorded knowledge of the hazards of asbestos and pulmonary disease goes back to the time of Christ, in around 1 A.D. The Romans introduced transparent bladder skins as respirators for their slaves to avoid the inhalation of dust or more likely to decrease the amount inhaled as they wove the asbestos fibre in the production of textiles. The U.S. legal expert Barry Castleman made the suggestion that the respirators extended the lives of Roman slaves because “While the Romans did not have pathologists with microscopes or the science of radiology available to them, they saw the gross effects of asbestos inhalation on their workers”. However, medical literature on the risks of asbestos only dates from the 1890s, some twenty or so years after asbestos mining commenced again.¹

As the twentieth century advanced, the growing number of research findings correlating asbestos exposure with asbestosis (scarring of the lung tissue after high levels of exposure), lung cancer (which developed in the lining of the lung's airways) and mesothelioma (a cancer of the lining of the chest or abdomen) prompted media attention and debates worldwide.² These findings called into question the use of asbestos and the lack of effective precautions to safeguard workers' health. By the 1960s Dr Irving Selikoff in New York was warning that exposure to asbestos was dangerous no matter how trivial the amount. The inertia of governments and the financial and legal resources of powerful asbestos corporations meant that the use of the mineral continued well into the twentieth century. For many decades the global asbestos industry successfully concealed that it had knowingly exposed workers and their families to the risk of contracting asbestos-related disease. It was only once lawyers could prove the industry's negligence that victims began to pursue damages claims successfully in the courts. CSR, who took over the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine in Western Australia in 1943, became part of this conflicted landscape.³

¹ Castleman, B.I. (1996), *Asbestos: Medical and Legal aspects* (4th edn.; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Aspen Law & Business), pp. 1-2.

² McCulloch, J. & Tweedale, G. (2008), *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and Its Fight for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 3.

³ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit.

By the mid 1930s the regulatory authorities in Perth were aware of the risk of occupational disease from asbestos exposure, with four cases reported at the James Hardie asbestos factory in Rivervale. During the same period, Lang Hancock began asbestos mining in Wittenoom. By the mid 1940s, he had sold the Wittenoom mine to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, as CSR was then known. CSR was expanding into the building industry and had been looking for a suitable additive to strengthen its building materials. Blue asbestos (or crocidolite) with its strengthening, insulating and acid- and fire-resistant properties was ideal. CSR and ABA Limited, the company's subsidiary operating the mine, were assisted in their endeavours by the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments.

Both governments wanted to establish a viable mining industry in the far northwest of Western Australia in order to stimulate economic growth and at the same time set up a self-sufficient asbestos industry, rather than rely on overseas imports. The Commonwealth also lent its support in order to create a presence in the underpopulated north for border safety reasons. Both governments invested in the development of the town which grew around the mine. The Western Australian government provided much of Wittenoom's infrastructure, while the Commonwealth granted subsidies from time to time. Regardless of the scientific knowledge the Colonial Sugar Refining Company acquired about the hazards of asbestos exposure and asbestos-related diseases, it was lax in implementing improvements or carrying out maintenance to address the ongoing hazardous working conditions in the mine and mill, or ignored them altogether. The Commonwealth and Western Australian governments wanted to see the Wittenoom venture succeed at any cost. Consequently, despite the recommendations in the Mines Inspectors' reports and the efforts of the Department of Health to ensure the health of Wittenoom workers, the Department of Mines failed to enforce the Mines Regulation Act.

Workers went to Wittenoom in the belief they could create a better future in exchange for a few years of hard work for high earnings.⁴ However, the clouds of dust in the mill and the cramped conditions and poor ventilation in the mine deterred all but the most

⁴ These high earnings came from work on contract, working overtime or taking on several jobs.

determined. In the 1940s Australian ticketed miners preferred the conditions in the Kalgoorlie gold mines to those at Wittenoom. Unable to maintain a reliable workforce, from 1950 ABA Limited were sent workers from the Displaced Persons pool arriving in Australia. To source experienced miners, in 1951 ABA Limited went to northern Italy to recruit workers. These men came from mining areas of the Seriana Valley in Lombardy, and from the Trentino Alto Adige region. Many of these men had worked in Italian and Belgian mines and on the construction of the Alpine dams and tunnels. Others came from the Island of Elba where its coal mine was in financial difficulties and miners were about to be laid off. Eventually news of the high earnings spread among Italian migrants already in Western Australia. Many went to Wittenoom despite having been told about the difficult working conditions.

The Italians were the largest migrant group in Wittenoom among the 52 groups listed. To meet their financial goals, the Italians were desperate to find work or earn higher wages than those on offer in other parts of Western Australia. Many took their families. The high cost of living, the need to repay debts and send remittances to family meant it took longer to save. This led to longer stays; some Italian families would remain as many as ten years. Others could not tolerate the working conditions and the climate: nearly half the workers left within four months of their arrival.

For most of the people with whom I spoke, Wittenoom made a substantial contribution to their achievement of *sistemazione* in Italy or Western Australia. Nevertheless, they also live with the legacy of Wittenoom — the death of loved ones to asbestos-related disease, as a result of asbestos exposure, and the fear that they too could still develop mesothelioma nearly fifty years after Wittenoom's closure.

* * * * *

Two bodies of existing literature, the history of Italian migration and writings on the global asbestos industry and asbestos-related diseases, have been particularly helpful in providing the context for my work and I will refer to them throughout the body of the thesis. However, most of this work overlooks the Wittenoom Italians.

The history of Italian migration has proven very useful, for historically it has established the reasons for Italians' migration decisions and their subsequent experiences.⁵ Within this body of history, most studies on Italian migration to Australia and Western Australia and related issues of the family, caring and aged care and emotional and moral support overlook the Wittenoom Italians, apart from Iuliano's 2010 study.⁶ Pertinent to the Italian migration context of this research, Western Australian historians, Baldassar, Vellecoop Baldock and Wilding note that most studies of Italian migration in the past have concentrated on two main themes: Italians as labourers with a focus on the political, climate and economic reasons for their migrations, and migrants as ethnic populations in specific host-nation contexts focusing on identity and integration issues.⁷ The former is discussed by a range of historians including Bosworth, Gabaccia and Sassen.⁸ Historians such as Collins, Alcorso and Borrie address the latter theme.⁹ None of these studies makes reference to the Wittenoom Italians. Furthermore, the children who went to Wittenoom were also overlooked

⁵ See, for example, Baldassar, L. & Pesman, R. (2005), *From Paesani to Global Italians: Veneto Migrants in Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press). Baldassar, L. (2001), *Visits Home: Migration experiences between Italy and Australia* (Carlton Melbourne University Press). Gabaccia, D. (2000), *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press). Castles, S., et al. (1992), *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin). Cecilia, P. Tito (1985), *Non siamo arrivati ieri*, ed. Scalabrinians (Red Cliffs, Victoria: The Sunnyland Press). Trans: We did not arrive yesterday. Gentilli, J., Stransky, C., & Iraci, C. (1983), *Italian Roots in Australian Soil: Italian Migration to Western Australia 1829-1946*; (Marangaroo, W.A.: Italo-Australian Welfare Centre).

⁶ Iuliano, S. (2010), *Vite Italiane Italian Lives in Western Australia*; (Perth: UWA Publishing). Baldassar, L. (2007), 'Transnational Families and Aged Care: The Mobility of Care and the Migrancy of Ageing', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33 (2), pp. 275-97. Baldassar, L. (2007), 'Transnational Families and the Provision of Moral and Emotional Support: The Relationship between Truth and Distance', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 14 (4), pp. 385-409. Baldassar, L., Vellecoop Baldock, C., & Wilding, R. (2007), *Families Caring Across Borders: Migration, Ageing and Transnational Caregiving* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan).

⁷ Baldassar, Vellecoop Baldock & Wilding, Op Cit.

⁸ Sassen, S. (1999), *Guests and Aliens*; (New York: The New Press). Gabaccia, D. (1998), 'Italian history and gli italiani al mondo' part 2', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 3, 1, pp. 73-97. Gabaccia, D. (1997), 'Italian history and gli italiani al mondo' part 1', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 2, 1, pp. 5-64. Bosworth, R. (1988), 'Post-war Italian Immigration', in J. Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the nation, its People and Their Origins*; (Sydney: Angus and Robertson).

⁹ Collins, J. (1988), *Migrants in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-war Immigration*; (Sydney: Pluto Press). Alcorso, C. (1992), 'Early Italian migration and the construction of European Australia 1788-1939', in Castles, S., et al. (eds.), *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin), pp. 1-17. Borrie, W. D. (1994), *The European Peopling of Australia: A Demographic History 1788-1988* (Canberra Demography Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University).

until the publication of my journal article in 2011.¹⁰ The ex-Wittenoom Italians' narratives will accordingly add to this body of Italian migration literature.

The literature on the growth of the global asbestos industry has been equally helpful as it informs the history of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine and CSR's management of it. The global asbestos industry fought for as long as possible to protect their financial interests and brought into question the scientific knowledge as they increased asbestos production between the 1960s and 1980s.¹¹ This was at a time when research referred increasingly to the till then rare disease, mesothelioma.¹²

My research on Wittenoom led me to several histories of the mine and many articles which record the increasing numbers of asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma cases among ex-workers and former residents. References to Italians at Wittenoom appear in several Australian historical accounts.¹³ Italian researchers' focus has been on Italians' perceptions of risk and Italian miners' mortality statistics up to 1997.¹⁴ The first recorded mesothelioma case of a repatriated Italian was reported in Italy in 1986.¹⁵ A collaborative

¹⁰ Di Pasquale, A. (2011), 'Western Australia's Wittenoom Gorge Blue Asbestos Mine: 'Se l'avessimo saputo, non ci avremmo mai portato i figli'', *Italian Studies*, 66 (3), pp. 353-77. Trans: If we had known, we would never have taken our children.

¹¹ See McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. Kazan-Allen, L. (2003), 'The Asbestos War', *International Journal of Occupational Environmental Health*, 9, pp. 173-93. Tweedale, G. (2001), *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust: Turner & Newall and the Asbestos Hazard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

¹² See Castleman, Op Cit. for a comprehensive history on asbestos-related diseases.

¹³ Layman, L. (1983), 'Work and Worker Responses at Wittenoom, 1943-1966', *Community Health Studies* 7, pp. 1-18. McCulloch, J. (1986), *Asbestos: Its Human Cost* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press). Layman, L. (1992), 'Migrant Labour Under Contract: The First Years of Post-war Migration 1947-1952', in R. Bosworth and R. Ugolino (eds.), *War, Internment and Mass Migration: The Italo-Australian Experience 1940-1990* (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione). McCulloch, J. (2006), 'The Mine at Wittenoom: Blue Asbestos, Labour and Occupational Disease', *Labour History* 47 (1), pp. 1-19. McCulloch, J. (2008), 'Surviving blue asbestos: mining and occupational disease in South Africa and Australia', *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 65, pp. 68-93.

¹⁴ Cappelletto, F. & Merler, M. (2003), 'Perceptions of health hazards in the narratives of Italian migrant workers at an Australian asbestos mine (1943-1966)', *Social Science and Medicine* 56 (5), pp. 1047-59. Merler, E., et al. (1999), 'On Italian migrants to Australia who worked at the crocidolite mine at Wittenoom Gorge Western Australia: Part 1 – Work at Wittenoom: Italians at Wittenoom and their Mortality up to 1987, and the mortality of those who returned to the home country up to 1997. Part 2 – Risk perception and risk communication among Italians exposed to asbestos at Wittenoom', in Grieco, A., Iacovoli, S. & Berlinguer, G. (eds.), *Contributions to the History of Occupational and Environmental Prevention* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science), pp. 277-304. Merler, E., Ercolanelli, M., & de Klerk, N. (2000), 'Identificazione e mortalità dei migranti italiani, ritornati in Italia dopo aver lavorato alla miniera di crocidolite di Wittenoom Gorge, Western Australia', *Epidemiologia e Prevenzione*, 6, pp. 255-61. Trans: Identification and mortality of repatriated Italian migrants after having worked at the crocidolite mine at Wittenoom Gorge, Western Australia. Merler, E. et al., 1996, 'Asbestos- Related Mortality among Italian Migrants to Western Australia', *Epidemiology* 7, pp. 556-57.

¹⁵ Pizzolitto, S. Barillari, B. & De Cesare, M. (1986), 'Mesotelioma maligno diffuso del peritoneo ed esposizione all'asbesto', *Pathologica*, 78, pp. 57-70. Trans: "Diffuse malignant peritoneal mesothelioma and exposure to asbestos."

study involving Italian and Australian researchers has compiled the provenance of the ex-Italian Wittenoom workers and posed the question of compensation for repatriated Italians with an ARD. Returning ex-miners experienced economic difficulty because they had not received any compensation. Furthermore living in small villages meant they lacked access to adequate medical treatment or their illness may have been incorrectly diagnosed.¹⁶

Histories of Wittenoom, however, focus on the following matters: the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments support for asbestos mining, CSR's reasons for taking on the Wittenoom venture, the ongoing labour shortages and occupational health and safety problems at the mine which were never overcome.¹⁷ From 1962 Western Australian researchers began reporting on the health consequences of asbestos exposure — mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. By 1989 researchers had published long term predictions about asbestos-related disease in the Wittenoom community.¹⁸

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I have integrated these themes in the existing literature with the oral histories I have gathered from participants who coalesce into three discernible groups. The first two groups I located in northern Italy and Western Australia; while the members of the third group I found in Melbourne and Western Australia. The first group comprises thirty-seven participants: thirteen ex-miners and millers, eight wives and seven children who lived in Wittenoom as well as nine surviving family members who never went there but shared their parents' or

¹⁶ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit.

¹⁷ See, for example, Layman, L (1981), 'Changing Resource Development Policy in Western Australia, 1930s -1960s', in E.J. Harman and B.W. Head (eds.), *State, Capital and Resources in the North and West of Australia*; Nedlands, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press. Layman, L. (1994), 'The Blue Asbestos Industry at Wittenoom in Western Australia: A Short History', in Hendersen, D. W., et al. (eds.), *Malignant Mesothelioma* (New York: Hemisphere Publ Inc), pp. 305-27. McCulloch (1986), Op Cit.

¹⁸ See, for example, McNulty, J. C. (1962), 'Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma in an Asbestos Worker', *Medical Journal Australia* 2, pp. 953-54. Elder, J. L. (1967), 'Asbestosis in Western Australia', *Medical Journal Australia* 2, pp. 579-83. de Klerk, N. H., Armstrong, B. K., & Musk, A. W. (1989a), 'Prediction of future cases of asbestos-related disease in former miners and millers of crocidolite in Western Australia', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 151, 616-20. Hansen, J. et al. (1998), 'Environmental Exposure to Crocidolite and Mesothelioma', *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 157, pp. 69-75. Reid, A. et al. (2008), 'Cancer incidence among women and girls environmentally and occupationally exposed to blue asbestos at Wittenoom, Western Australia', *International Journal of Cancer*, 122 (10), pp. 2337-44.

husbands' migration stories and photographs.¹⁹ The second group is made up of eight Italians, who never emigrated but provided accounts of life in Italy before and after World War 2. The third group includes members of the ADSA in Perth, one lawyer (now in Melbourne but involved in the 1989 Wittenoom class action) and several doctors and researchers in Western Australia.

I asked participants to address four broad areas: their memories or what they knew of early life in Italy, upon arriving in Western Australia, life during and after ex-residents' time in Wittenoom, when they first heard about ARDs and the impact of asbestos-related diseases in their lives. Participants' narratives have provided rich data to reconstruct the social history of the Wittenoom Italians in the context of their transnational migration, their work lives at Wittenoom and elsewhere, family strategies, community associations and the personal cost to them as a result of their or a family member's exposure to asbestos at Wittenoom.

* * * * *

Over six hundred documents provided by the U.S. law firm, Motley Rice, have also been invaluable. The Motley Rice papers have permitted a more detailed account of the roles of CSR and government in pursuing the development of the Wittenoom mine at the expense of the workers and town residents. They were obtained during the course of legal discovery: some documents had been available but many have not appeared previously on the public record. These and other primary sources I located during my archival searches have helped to piece together several pertinent elements of Wittenoom's history in order to place in the public domain a more complete record of several matters.

These cover the scientific knowledge on asbestos-related diseases available to CSR and Western Australian regulatory authorities, CSR's lack of expertise in the industry and its reluctance to carry out maintenance and improvements at Wittenoom unless to increase production levels, the attempts of the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments to see Wittenoom succeed at any cost, CSR and the Department of Mines relationship with the Department of Health, and CSR's clandestine strategy to avoid legal liability for their

¹⁹ I interviewed 36 participants. In 2010 the late Umberto Martinengo, SBS radio journalist, provided me with a recording of his interview with Sperandio Delpero (by 2010 deceased), one of the Vermiglio miners.

workers' asbestos-related diseases. The histories on Wittenoom fall short of providing a detailed account of the contrary position of CSR and the Department of Mines to the Department of Health on occupational health and safety at Wittenoom. One article, which addresses CSR's strategy to avoid legal liability proved difficult to locate. I finally obtained it directly from John Gordon, one of its authors.²⁰

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The main focus of this research is the exploration of the impact of the Wittenoom asbestos mine considered from the perspective of Italians who were in Wittenoom during the 1950s and 1960s. My broad areas of concern are: how the Wittenoom Italians attributed meaning to the historical circumstances that produced them as migrants in the first place; how they made sense of their life in Wittenoom, their *sistemazione* post Wittenoom and how they dealt with the deaths of loved ones and friends from asbestos-related diseases arising from asbestos exposure at Wittenoom. In particular, this thesis examines their life in Italy as a context for their migration decisions; makes a comparison of these Italians' expectations with the reality they found at Wittenoom; combines the history of the past and present to determine the role Wittenoom has played to bring about their *sistemazione*, as the health consequences of asbestos exposure at Wittenoom became apparent often years after their departure.

Chapter One provides a historical framework for the global asbestos industry and CSR's entry into asbestos mining with its purchase of the Wittenoom mine in 1943, which it operated through its subsidiary, ABA Limited. The chapter looks briefly at several themes, some of which are taken up again in more detail later in the body of the thesis. It begins with an explanation of asbestos related diseases followed by a discussion of Wittenoom's location and an overview of the development of the mine. To contextualise the history of the Wittenoom mine, the global asbestos industry's efforts to extend its life in the face of mounting medical evidence on ARDs and the industry's failure to regulate and consequently neglect workers' health are then outlined. The chapter concludes with the issue of litigation in

²⁰ Vojakovic, R. & Gordon, J. (1995), 'The Victims' Perspective', in G.A. Peters and B.J. Peters (eds.), *Sourcebook on Asbestos Diseases* (13; Charlottesville: Lexis Law Publication), pp. 375-410.

Australia, which CSR and the James Hardie Company (Australia's two largest miners and producers of asbestos products) fought assiduously. Both companies employed delaying tactics designed to avoid or limit damages payments, in view of victims' impending deaths.

Chapter Two — A Tradition of Storytelling: Collecting the Stories from the Inside — outlines my choice of methodologies, how I went about collecting the oral histories and my analysis of the data. The two aims of this research — to give these marginalized people a voice and to determine the impact of the Wittenoom asbestos mine in their lives — inform my choice of methodology. I combine an oral history approach, the use of photographs and documentary evidence supplied by Motley Rice and my own archival searches, along with other primary and secondary resources. The search for participants was akin to a detective's approach: I informed people of the nature of my research and asked them if they knew anyone who had been to Wittenoom. From these conversations and serendipitous events I found willing participants.

The title of this chapter arose from my own experience as a child of Italian migrants and from Italian historian Alessandro Portelli's discussion of Italians coming from an oral storytelling tradition.²¹ As a child of Italian migrants, I had witnessed my parents and their siblings and friends sharing popular stories during weekend visits. My Italian background, my personality and my ability to speak Italian and understand several dialects helped to establish a rapport much more readily than might have otherwise been the case. The chapter ends with a discussion of oral history debates in relation to the analysis of the participants' narratives.

In Chapter Three I draw on participants' accounts of their lives in Italy to analyse the reasons which led to their decision to come to Australia and how they heard about Wittenoom and employment opportunities in Australia. Historical accounts of anti-Italian feelings which arose prior to World War 2 provide the context for Australia's post-war immigration policy which excluded Italians. This policy changed in 1950 when it was clear that the anticipated numbers of Northern Europeans had failed to arrive. They were meant to fill positions in the government's National Development Scheme implemented to stimulate

²¹ Portelli, A. (1981), 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop*, 12, pp. 96-107.

economic growth. Included in the government's plan was the establishment of a self-sufficient asbestos industry at Wittenoom. Italy's high unemployment and working class Italians desperate need to find work complemented Australia's post war immigration policy. In light of their life of hardship, Italians proved ideal employees, willing to labour in the dirtier industries where Australians refused to work. During the two decades of the mine's operation, of the 52 migrant groups at Wittenoom the 1,102 Italian migrant workers formed the largest group in a workforce of 7,000. In mid 1950 the first Italian workers to arrive at the mining town were among the Displaced Persons of the International Refugee Organization resettlement plan. They were followed in 1951 by those recruited directly by ABA Limited from the northern Italian regions of Lombardy, Trentino Alto Adige and the Island of Elba. Eventually more Italians arrived to work in Wittenoom: they came from Italy, sponsored by family already in Wittenoom or from elsewhere in Western Australia having heard by word of mouth about the high earnings at Wittenoom.

The participants' narratives and the Motley Rice documents inform Chapter Four. These provide an insight into the working and living conditions at Wittenoom. For many the red flat earth, with the Hamersley Ranges backdrop and the miles of Spinifex grass were reminiscent of the Wild West towns they had seen in cowboy movies. Wittenoom bore no resemblance to the way of life they had left behind in Italy. All were shocked by the climate, the accommodation and working conditions. Work in the low stopes was backbreaking and ore processing in the mill created clouds of dust, with the heat making it impossible to wear masks. Workers were suspicious of the dust, but the company never informed them of the health implications. The conditions created a highly transient population. Many of the first recruited northern Italian miners who had arrived in 1951 refused to remain in the town. They left once they had paid back their air fare. The Italians who stayed for extended periods tended to be those with accompanying families. The impact of drinking and gambling punctuate the men's stories. Nevertheless, there are also accounts and photos of the fun and the range of activities in which the men engaged. The feelings of isolation and loneliness were alleviated to some extent with the arrival of the Italian women and children.

In Chapter Five the arrival of the women and their families sees the reintroduction of Italian rites of passage, rituals which created a sense of normality and of community. The moral support the women provided to their husbands and the single young men was significant and commented upon by several of the male interviewees. The women also offered each other moral support in times of need. Several Italian women reported working outside the home in paid employment at the General Store, the Wittenoom hospital, the Single Men's mess and the Italian coffee bar. Many of the women contributed to the family's income by establishing boarding houses, preparing meals and washing the men's clothing. The women became surrogate mothers for many of the young single men wanting a home-made meal and the companionship of families. Many Italian women gave birth to children while in Wittenoom. Several accounts reveal the doctor's lack of sensitivity and trips to Perth for subsequent births and other medical treatment.

In Chapter Six the children's accounts reveal a freedom and idyllic lifestyle in Wittenoom which those with memories of life in Italy had never experienced. The boys' narratives suggest they were more likely to be permitted to roam widely and engage in activities which landed them in trouble. The girls' memories, on the other hand, indicate a more subdued existence. Nonetheless they were allowed some measure of independence to participate in activities without parental supervision. Sadly, child mortalities occurred: some babies died in child birth or diseases took the lives of young children.

Chapter Seven considers the Italians' lives post Wittenoom to determine whether they achieved *sistemazione*. Easier access to the larger numbers of Italians who remained in Western Australia has given rise to richer accounts of their *sistemazione*. At least a quarter of participants reported having purchased a home, farm or business outright upon their return to Perth; others reported having saved enough for a deposit, while a minority had to start again having squandered their money on gambling and drinking while in Wittenoom.

The Italians' efforts to achieve and consolidate their *sistemazione* were ongoing. Those who remained in Perth continued to seek better paying jobs. Young men married the single Italian girl they had met in Wittenoom or the pretty Italian girl met by chance in a Perth street, others were joined by childhood sweethearts or their proxy bride from Italy. Half of the

participants in this research eventually became self-employed, with several becoming well-known identities in Perth because of their business acumen. Their children have also achieved *sistemazione*. They have undertaken tertiary education, found white collar jobs, developed their own businesses or learned a trade. The Wittenoom Italians with whom I visited in northern Italy had also become well-established (or *sistemati*); their homes were evidence of this, as was the success of their children in chosen fields. They had found permanent employment or became self-employed — even if not to the extent of those who remained in Western Australia. Of course, there was also mention of those Italians who led a day-to-day existence and because of their drinking and gambling problems died destitute.

Chapter Eight discusses the legacy of Wittenoom — the impact of asbestos-related diseases on the lives of the victims and their families as they pursued *sistemazione*. Some Italians had left Wittenoom already showing signs of disease. As the years progressed, more and more workers and their wives and children were to become victims of mesothelioma. I describe the lives of several men, one who was a child in Wittenoom. They had to deal with a gradual deterioration of their health as asbestosis symptoms worsened ending in their deaths or the diagnosis of mesothelioma and an agonising death within a year. The survivors live with the knowledge of those painful deaths and the fear that they one day might succumb in a similar fashion, given that mesothelioma can develop even from trivial exposure. As a result of the knowledge regarding asbestos-related disease which has spread among the Wittenoom Italians as their own spouses and Wittenoom friends have died, several parents expressed guilt for having taken their children.

Using the Motley Rice documents extensively in Chapter Nine, I elaborate upon the reasons for the legacy of Wittenoom. I outline the scientific knowledge available to CSR and the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments on asbestos-related diseases beginning from as early as 1922, in Australia and elsewhere. Various items of correspondence in the Motley Rice documents present the intractable position of the Department of Mines and CSR in the light of the Mines Inspectors reports. In contrast to CSR and the Department of Mines, the Department of Health, which had no say in health matters in the mining industry, attempted unsuccessfully to use those reports and other information

they gathered to safeguard worker health. CSR and the department of Mines position was underpinned by the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments' desire to see Wittenoom succeed at any cost. The mounting reports of workers developing an asbestos-related disease at Wittenoom failed to influence their position. As the media began reporting on what had gone on at Wittenoom, CSR took clandestine measures to avoid legal liability as early as 1974, at the expense of dying ex-workers. Evidence that CSR was aware of its negligence, acknowledged privately by them in 1977, only surfaced in 1988. It was leaked to a journalist by an unknown source. That person's name remains undisclosed to this day.

In the final chapter I discuss what has struck me particularly about my research findings. The evidence presented suggests that CSR and Commonwealth and Western Australian governments have all contributed to the deaths reported in the Wittenoom population, as well as those which have and will continue to present in the Australian population generally, and anywhere else Wittenoom's blue asbestos was sold.

Finally, the conclusion points to contemporary issues regarding asbestos exposure. Asbestos will continue to create health problems in those who unwittingly disturb it long after the last of the ex-Wittenoom population have died; asbestos is contained in many products still present in our environment.

Chapter One - The International Asbestos Landscape and the Wittenoom Blue Asbestos Mine

The growth of the global asbestos industry advanced unabated during the twentieth century, despite the mounting research linking occupational and environmental asbestos exposure to asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.¹ The industry hid behind its corporate veil, gradually developing seemingly innocuous institutions to promote their reputations and their views on the benefits of asbestos. Through their apologists in government, media, medicine and academia, the asbestos industry denied the extent of the asbestos hazard; intimidated researchers and questioned research findings and the motives of lawyers defending asbestos victims.² These strategies and the asbestos industry's intractable position in compensation claims have been central to the longevity of asbestos mining and manufacturing and the production of 3,000 asbestos based commodities. This explains why asbestos manufacture continues in Russia, Canada, Asia, Latin America and Africa today.³ In late 2012, however, the situation changed in Canada, with Quebec's newly elected government and federal authorities in Ottawa withdrawing their support for asbestos mining.

In 1943 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) — a successful sugar producer in Australia — entered the global asbestos landscape.⁴ The company bought the mining rights to the Wittenoom asbestos mine, assured of the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments' support in the development of the until then *ad-hoc* operation. Just as had occurred in overseas asbestos mines, CSR's workers faced challenging working conditions and eventually asbestos-related health problems, which CSR failed to address. Instead, the company courted international asbestos corporations as customers for their fibre. Wittenoom's closure in 1966 was supposedly due to the mine's lack of profitability. In response to media attention of 1974 and in anticipation of common law claims, by 1977 CSR had prepared a strategy of denial regarding its knowledge of the dangers of asbestos

¹ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. Chapters 3 & 4. Castleman, Op Cit.

² McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit.

³ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. Kazan-Allen, Op Cit. Ruff, K. (2008), 'Exporting Harm: How Canada Markets Asbestos to the Developing World', (Ontario: Rideau Institute).

⁴ The company only became known as CSR Limited in 1973 to modernize its corporate identity. Bright, J. & Salame, D. (2007), 'CSR Limited', International Directory of Company Histories (85: Encyclopedia.com).

exposure. They hid behind their subsidiary and operator of the mine A.B.A. Ltd's (by the mid 1970s known as Midalco) limited liability. The company contested civil claims rigorously until 1988, when evidence of CSR's negligence emerged.⁵ The consequences of occupational asbestos exposure — deaths from asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma — were finally acknowledged in court.

The knowledge of the asbestos hazard has gradually been spreading across the Australian community through the various states' asbestos support groups and the media. In 2012 the Australian government's establishment of an Office of Asbestos Safety was in response to the increasing numbers of asbestos-related deaths and the acknowledgement of the need to develop a national strategic plan to improve asbestos awareness and management arrangements.⁶

Asbestos, Asbestos-Related Diseases and Research

In the twentieth century manufacturers prized asbestos (a generic name given to a group of fibrous minerals) because of its facility to be split into long and flexible fibres for spinning and weaving, its resistance to heat and acids, its insulating properties with respect to heat and electricity and its strengthening quality in cement and building products.⁷ Six types of asbestos — chrysotile (white asbestos), crocidolite (blue asbestos), amosite (brown asbestos), tremolite, anthophyllite and actinolite — possess these characteristics in differing degrees.⁸ Chrysotile, crocidolite and amosite were mined on a large scale.⁹ The potential of blue asbestos to create lightweight but strong building materials interested CSR. The first disease to be associated with asbestos exposure was asbestosis, named by Fahr in 1914.¹⁰ Gradually, increasing reports of lung cancer and mesothelioma also emerged.¹¹

⁵ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. Hills, B. (1989), *Blue Murder: Two Thousand Doomed to Die: The Shocking Truth about Wittenoom's Deadly Dust*. (Melbourne: Sun books).

⁶ Shorten, B. (2012), 'A national approach to asbestos management', in Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (ed.), (Canberra: Ministers' Media Centre Education, Employment and Workplace Relations).

⁷ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. pp. 2-3.

⁸ Merewether, E. R. A. & Price, C. W. (1930), 'Report on the Effects of Asbestos Dust on the Lungs and Dust Suppression in the Asbestos Industry', (London: Department of the Home Office), p. 6.

⁹ McCulloch (2006), Op Cit. p. 16.

¹⁰ Elder, Op Cit. p. 580.

¹¹ Castleman, Op Cit. provides a comprehensive history of the research on the three asbestos-related diseases — asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Asbestosis occurs as a result of high levels of asbestos exposure, which leads to scarring of lung tissue. With increased scarring blood flow becomes restricted, requiring the heart to pump harder. Progressive deterioration in lung capacity results in breathing difficulties, even after mild physical exertion. Clubbing of the fingers and cyanosis (blueness of the skin) also can occur. Eventually the victim becomes incapacitated, needing oxygen to breathe, and is also prone to infections such as chronic bronchitis or pneumonia. Death usually eventuates from respiratory or heart failure prompted by a secondary infection.¹² By 1947 English research had reported the coexistence of lung cancer in some workers whose recorded death had been from asbestosis.¹³

Cancer due to asbestos exposure can develop on the lung or the pleura, the thin membrane which protects the lung. Lung cancer and mesothelioma have a long latency period, spanning one to four decades and longer. This latency period was one of the reasons it took so long to distinguish lung cancer from mesothelioma.¹⁴ An insidious malignant tumour, mesothelioma can develop from even trivial exposure. More commonly occurring on the pleura, in rarer cases mesothelioma can develop on the protective lining of the abdominal cavity, the peritoneum.¹⁵ In pleural mesothelioma the lung capacity decreases as the malignant tumour grows. Fluid accumulates in the pleural space causing excruciating pain. The victim suffocates. In peritoneal mesothelioma the tumour covers the peritoneum. The area swells from the accumulation of fluid, causing nausea, loss of appetite and acute pain as the swelling exerts pressure on the surrounding organs. Once this malignant tumour has enveloped the lung or the lining of the abdominal cavity the victim usually dies within a year.¹⁶

Asbestos use and knowledge of its impact on workers' health date back to the 1st century A.D. The Romans noticed the deteriorating health of their slaves weaving asbestos. The Roman historian, Pliny, referred to the Romans' institution of the use of masks, made of

¹² McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 43.

¹³ Ibid. p. 44.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 49.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 48-51

¹⁶ Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc. (2003), *Asbestos: what you should know* (3rd edn.; Western Australia), pp. 26–27. For a discussion of the structure of the fibre and the body's defences to deal with irritant particles see McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. p. 3.

the stomach lining of animals, to avoid inhalation of dusts. The consequences of asbestos exposure only resurfaced in the last two decades of the 19th century, with the commencement of asbestos mining in South Africa and Canada.¹⁷ Multinational corporations — Cape Asbestos and Turner & Newall in the U.K. and Johns-Manville in the U.S. — would dominate mining and manufacture for nearly a century.¹⁸ In England, by 1902, the Lady Inspector of Factories commented that “some of the most injurious processes known to us now are extremely ancient,” among them “the textile process of preparing and weaving asbestos.” She noted that Pliny referred to those “injurious processes” as the cause of the “diseases of slaves”.¹⁹ In the twentieth century, workers’ ill-health would continue to be a problem in the asbestos mines and factories of Europe, Africa, Asia, South and North America and Wittenoom.²⁰ It is still the case in Asia, Africa and South America.²¹ Asbestos use was justified in terms of its benefits which, the industry argued, outweighed the dangers.²²

¹⁷ Castleman, Op Cit. Chapter 1. Castleman is most probably referring to Pliny the Elder in this chapter, as he, and not Pliny the Younger, published an encyclopaedia entitled *Naturalis Historia*. Pliny the Younger was a lawyer and magistrate.

¹⁸ Hills, Op Cit. pp. 9 -10. See McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. for a detailed account of the global asbestos industry. Castleman, Op Cit. Chapter 1 for the early reports on asbestos exposure. See Tweedale, Op Cit. for a history of Turner & Newall.

¹⁹ Anderson, A.M. (1902), 'Historical Sketch of the Development of Legislation for Injurious and Dangerous Industries in England', in T. Oliver (ed.), *Dangerous Trades* (New York: Dutton), p. 25.

²⁰ Castleman, Op Cit. See also McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. Ruff, Op Cit. Carnevale, F. (2007), 'Amianto: una tragedia di lunga durata. Argomenti utili per una ricostruzione storica dei fatti più rilevanti', *Epidemiol Prev* 31 (4), pp. 53-74. Trans: Asbestos: a tragedy of long duration: Useful topics for a historical reconstruction of the most relevant facts. Kazan-Allen, Op Cit. Le Blanc, Op Cit. Tweedale, Op Cit. McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. Brodeur, P. (1974), *Expendable Americans: The Incredible Story of How Tens of Thousands of American Men and Women Die Each Year of Preventable Industrial Disease* (New York: Viking).

²¹ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. The authors give a detailed analysis of the lengths to which corporations, with the support of governments, insurance companies and members of the medical profession have gone to question the considerable scientific literature regarding the hazards of asbestos to their employees and ultimately the end users; all in an attempt to maintain their markets. Asbestos mining continues in Russia: See Jago, M. (2010), 'Wrapped in the flax of denial', *Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 January. Jago's article paints a very similar picture to that of the Wittenoom asbestos mine. South American countries continue to fight against the marketing strategies of large asbestos corporations: See Kazan-Allen, Op Cit. Until late 2012 Canada marketed asbestos in Third World countries: See Ruff, Op Cit. There are three thousand products which contain asbestos: See Hills, Op Cit., pp. 9-10 and McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. pp 79, 119-120.

²² McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. p.14. The authors ask why the publicity about mesothelioma in 1960 did not mark a sea-change. They point out that one would have expected world asbestos production to decline. In fact it increased after 1960. Between 1900 and 2004, world asbestos production was approximately 182 million tonnes, of which 143 million tonnes were produced after 1960. These statistics are in Virta, R. L. (2006), 'Worldwide Asbestos Supply and Consumption Trends from 1900 through 2003', in USGS (ed.), p. 16.

The first reported death from asbestosis occurred in the textile industry in England at the turn of the twentieth century, but was only first reported in 1906 by Dr Montague Murray.²³ By the 1920s asbestosis was occurring in factories and mines in Africa, Europe and North America.²⁴ In 1922 Australia's Commonwealth Health Department published an index of health hazards in industry which included asbestos.²⁵ By the 1930s the association between asbestos exposure and asbestosis was confirmed and the development of cancer also noted.²⁶ In 1935 the Department of Labour in Western Australia was aware of the 1930 British report by Merewether on the effects of asbestos dust as it dealt with several cases of asbestosis in James Hardie's asbestos factory in Rivervale.²⁷ Case reports of asbestos-related cancer were published in England, Germany and the United States by the 1940s in reviews of industrial medicine, cancer research and pneumoconiosis.²⁸ Dr Enrico Vigliani's study on asbestos textile factories in Turin, commissioned by the Italian government in the 1930s, also reported on the health consequences to workers.²⁹ In the 1940s and 1950s reports of mesothelioma began to appear in the research literature.³⁰ Wagner's seminal paper in 1960 reported the development of mesothelioma in 33 black workers at the Northwest Cape blue asbestos mine in South Africa. It was the first of many papers on mesothelioma, including Dr McNulty's 1962 paper on the first case at Wittenoom in 1960.³¹ Subsequent data from Australian studies indicate that all states, and in particular, Western Australia, have incidence rates which are high in comparison with other countries.³² The highest incidence figures have been in males in countries mining blue asbestos: Australia and South Africa.³³

²³ Castleman, Op Cit. p. 3.

²⁴ Ibid. Chapter 1.

²⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10651: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 1922, An Index to Health Hazards in Industry.

²⁶ Castleman, Op Cit. Chapter 2.

²⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10653: Workers' Compensation Act, Dangerous Industrial Diseases and Diseases Arising Therefore, 8 March 1935.

²⁸ Castleman, Op Cit, p. 49.

²⁹ Vigliani, E. (1940), 'Studio sull'asbestosi nelle manifatture di amianto', (Stabilimento Tipografico Giovanni Capella-Ciriè). Trans: Study on asbestosis in asbestos factories.

³⁰ Castleman, Op Cit. p. 136.

³¹ McNulty (1962), Op Cit. Wagner, C., Sleggs, C. A. & Marchand, P. (1960), 'Diffuse Pleural Mesothelioma and Asbestos Exposure in the North West Cape Province', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 17 (4), pp. 260-71.

³² Xu, Armstrong, Blundson et al. Op Cit. Threlfall, Thompson & Olsen, Op Cit. p.39.

³³ Threlfall, Thompson & Olsen, Op Cit. p. 39.

The industry sponsored research into the effects of asbestos. What they did not do was halt production, despite the growing numbers of workers developing an asbestos-related disease.³⁴ In 1943 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company became part of the global asbestos industry with its purchase of the Wittenoom mine.

The Wittenoom Blue Asbestos Mine and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR)

The Wittenoom blue asbestos mine was located in the Pilbara region of the northwest of Western Australia — approximately 1,600 kilometres by road from Perth and 320 kilometres from the coast (see figure 1).³⁵ The red earth, white ghost gums, Spinifex grass and wild flowers provided, and still provide today, a picturesque backdrop for the now de-gazetted town.³⁶ Today only a handful of the original 178 houses remain standing and occupied in the town, 11 kilometres from the Wittenoom Gorge where the mine, mill and ABA Limited executives' settlement were located (see figures 2-7).³⁷

Between 1943 and 1966, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited operated the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine under the direction of its parent company CSR, by virtue of a managing agent's agreement that CSR exercised at its discretion.³⁸ CSR had purchased the mining rights to mine the veins of blue asbestos fibre found in the Hamersley Ranges from Lang

³⁴ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit.

³⁵ Musk, A. W., et al. (1992), 'Historical perspectives in occupational medicine. Wittenoom, Western Australia: A modern industrial disaster', *Journal of Industrial Medicine* 21 (5), p. 735.

³⁶ Ford, J. (2007), 'New Report into Wittenoom's asbestos risks', in *Regional Development* (ed.), Ministerial Media Statements (Perth: Government of Western Australia).

³⁷ National Archives of Australia, Perth, Department of Labour and National Service file no. 65/1153: Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Ltd. Wittenoom, p. 8. In September 2012 Emilia Oprandi (the daughter of one of the first group of recruited Lombard miners to arrive in Wittenoom in 1951) and I visited Wittenoom. Unless otherwise acknowledged I have taken the photos which I include in this thesis. The poorer quality of many of the photos reproduced in this thesis occurred for two reasons: participants preferred I take photos of their originals rather than take them away for scanning or because of the difficulty of removing photos from albums without damaging them.

³⁸ Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association, (2004), 'Submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation', p. 6. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom asbestos venture. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10237: Minutes of Meeting of Directors of Australian Blue Asbestos Limited. See 1943 entry: A form of agreement appointing CSR as managing agent and sole distributor was considered by the meeting. It was resolved that it be executed under the seal of the company.

Hancock in 1943. By the 1950s Wittenoom was the largest urban centre north of the Tropic of Capricorn.³⁹ The mine, which did not prove profitable, closed in 1966.⁴⁰

Asbestos had been mined on a small scale in the Hamersley Ranges since about 1908.⁴¹ Lang Hancock (who in 1952 would discover its rich iron ore deposits while flying over the Hamersley Ranges) first came across asbestos outcrops in Wittenoom Gorge while exploring as a young boy on the family's Mulga Downs sheep station in the early 1920s. By the late 1930s he was employing prospectors to mine the asbestos at Wittenoom Gorge. He considered the fibre there a better prospect for full scale mining, than that found in other parts of the Hamersley Ranges.⁴² He would make as much money in the back-freight of supplies and alcohol from the coast to the mine as he did from asbestos.⁴³ In the 1930s and 1940s Western Australian government policy on prospecting for asbestos, copper, iron ore and other minerals was limited to encouragement of "the little man". It was not until the 1960s that government policy supported the establishment of large scale mining projects which only large corporations had the capacity to undertake. CSR's entry into blue asbestos mining at Wittenoom in 1943 was the harbinger of the change to large scale mining.⁴⁴

CSR's origins were in England in the 1830s, at a time when English capital was being invested into pastoralist ventures in the Australian colonies. Two English businessmen, Francis Kemble and William Knox Child, saw Australia as a likely place for a sugar refinery. In 1855 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was established, and would eventually branch into various subsidiary companies. CSR's successful Building Materials Division had its beginnings with the use of asbestos in its building products from the 1950s.⁴⁵ In 2012 CSR

³⁹ Layman (1994), Op Cit. p. 306.

⁴⁰ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Wittenoom Aerodrome File 66/807. Press statement announcing the closure of Wittenoom from CSR General Manager, Sir James Vernon, 1 December 1966.

⁴¹ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 70. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story, (1963), Chapter 6. This history had been written at the request of Mr K. O. Brown, Chairman and Managing Director, ABA Pty. Ltd.

⁴² Hancock, L. (1966) 'Start of Blue Asbestos Industry in W.A.', *Australian Mining*, 15 March. The Western Australian Royal Historical Society archives, box 26 – 1974/29.

⁴³ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 70.

⁴⁴ Layman (1981), Op Cit.

⁴⁵ Lowndes, A. G. (ed.), (1956), *South Pacific Enterprise: The Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), Chapter 2.

had generated total revenue of \$1.862 billion and was ranked number 190 out of the top 2,000 companies in Australia.⁴⁶

CSR's entry into asbestos mining at Wittenoom came about for two reasons: the company's need to source asbestos within Australia for their Building Materials Division, established to meet the growing demand of the construction industry for inexpensive building materials, and the government's plan to make Australia self-sufficient in the production of that fibre. In 1942 CSR had acquired an asbestos cement factory in Sydney and had begun sourcing asbestos deposits in Australia. Concurrently the halting of asbestos imports during World War 2 had prompted the federal government to pursue the development of a self-sufficient asbestos mining industry. CSR became interested in the asbestos deposits at Wittenoom based on geological surveys conducted by the Department of Mines in the 1930s and early 1940s. The Department of Mines Report outlined the nature and extent of the deposits, the economic possibilities and the prospects of establishing an industry based on the production of blue asbestos.⁴⁷ The following year CSR acquired the Wittenoom leases and formed Australian Blue Asbestos Limited to operate the mine.⁴⁸ In Wittenoom Gorge the company built a staff settlement of 13 houses, while workers lived in barracks and tents.⁴⁹

The remoteness of the northwest of Western Australia and the crude working conditions hampered the mine's development as did the requirement for CSR Board approval on all matters pertaining to the running of the Wittenoom operation.⁵⁰ Several years passed before the venture would show any financial promise. In fact on several occasions

⁴⁶ IBISWorld (2012), 'IBISWorld Company Report: CSR Limited', p.4.

⁴⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Chapter 1.

⁴⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit 10246: The Inquiry into Asbestos Issues at Wittenoom by Hon. Mark Nevill and Alan Rogers, 1 August 1992, for the Western Australian Parliament, p. 27. The Settlement which housed Senior Staff and families is where Wittenoom Gorge meets Eastern Gorge, about one kilometre downstream from the Wittenoom Mine. Ironically the inquiry notes this privileged and scenic place was affected more by the dust from the mill than was the township of Wittenoom which was 10 kilometres away further down the Gorge.

⁵⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10571.0: Report from C. Adams, Inspector of Mines, Cue to the State Mining Engineer, Perth regarding the Western Australian Blue Asbestos Company 24 October 1945. Musk, A. W. et al., (1992), Op Cit. Williams, T. (1990), 'Wittenoom - A Personal Account', *AWU Journal*, pp. 7-11. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10142: Letter from Managing Director CSR to the Secretary ABA Ltd Perth, 10 September 1943. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibits no. 10147: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) and no. 10241: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 - 30 June 1987).

between 1943 and 1945 CSR considered whether it should continue with the project.⁵¹ The company proceeded because of Commonwealth and Western Australian governments' assurances of support in 1946.⁵² By 1947 sufficient work had been completed for the company to decide that the operation needed to be on a much larger scale, if it was to be profitable. Wittenoom's isolation and crude accommodation made it difficult to find a committed labour force, rendering the general progress of production slow.⁵³ Neither CSR nor the government seem to have taken into account the enormity of the task involved in developing a mine in such an isolated location. The company was a successful sugar producing company, but had no experience in mining. This lack of expertise together with the policy of keeping running costs to a minimum always hampered its progress.

For CSR to entice long-term workers and increase its production, proper accommodation for the men and their families and recreation facilities were to be essential.⁵⁴ By the late 1940s construction of a town for 700 to 1,000 people began.⁵⁵ The Western Australian government initially built 152 family homes (178 by 1963), a post office, hospital, police station, State School, and provided the town water supply. ABA Limited supplied accommodation for 100 single men (180 by 1963) and built a hotel, general store, butchery, bakery, library, café, employees' amenities building, cinema, tennis courts, cricket ground and race track.⁵⁶ An aerodrome was located about a mile from the town on Crown Land leased to Mulga Downs Limited. In 1950 Mulga Downs Limited agreed to the exclusion of that portion of land from its Pastoral Lease, allowing the Department of Aviation to lease and be responsible for the control and maintenance of the land for a sum of £ 2 [\$4] per year for

⁵¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibits no. 10147: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) and no. 10241: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 - 30 June 1987).

⁵² Motley Rice Plaintiff's exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1.

⁵³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147.00: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-67 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom Asbestos Venture. In November 1944 C.W.R. Powell brings the ABA Ltd labour shortage problem to the attention of the CSR Board.

⁵⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10571: Report from C. Adams, Inspector of Mines, Cue to the State Mining Engineer, Perth regarding the Western Australian Blue Asbestos Company 24 October 1945.

⁵⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Chapter 4.

fifteen years.⁵⁷ Subsequently a 9-hole golf course, tennis courts equipped for night play, a rifle club, sports oval, basket ball court, children's playground and a bowling green were built.⁵⁸ In 1956 the Catholic church-cum-school, Corpus Christi, opened.⁵⁹ The reported costs for the establishment of the town, in 1963, amounted to £750,000: the Western Australian and Federal governments' contribution was £600,000.⁶⁰

During the 23 years the mine operated 18,000 residents — workers and families from 52 migrant groups — lived in the town, with several families remaining long after the mine's closure. 7,000 workers were employed at the mine and mill or in the General Store, the Single Men's mess, the hospital, the Italian bar and as drivers. The Italians were the largest migrant group comprising 1,102 workers.⁶¹

Approximately 60 per cent of workers remained only six months, unable to tolerate the living and working conditions.⁶²

⁵⁷ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Wittenoom Gorge Aerodrome site. File no. 49/83. Part No. 1. Item no.1949/83.

⁵⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1. Long time Wittenoom resident, Venera Uculano, supplied the information that the golf course was made up of nine holes.

⁵⁹ Email communication from Sister Frances Stibi, Catholic Church Archives, Mt Lawley, Western Australia, 23 March 2011.

⁶⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 4.

⁶¹ Cappelletto & Merler, *Op Cit.* p. 1050.

⁶² Layman (1994), *Op Cit.* p. 311.



Figure 1: A map of Western Australia. Wittenoom is located on the edge of the Karijini National Park in the Hamersley Ranges. Retrieved from www.ozhorizons.com.au/wa/map.htm



Figure 2: A view of remaining houses in Wittenoom 2010.



Figure 3: The Pilbara landscape 2010.



Figure 4: The Wittenoom Gem Store 2010.



Figure 5: Wittenoom Gorge. Photo courtesy Venera Uculano.



Figure 6: View of the Hamersley Ranges from Wittenoom 2010.



Figure 7: Mulla Mulla wild flowers in the Pilbara 2010.

The Wittenoom Operation, the Personnel and Industrial Process

To address its lack of mining expertise CSR established contacts with international asbestos mining and manufacturing companies — Johns-Manville Corporation in the U.S. and Turner & Newall in England. Various international executives also visited Wittenoom from time to time. In turn, CSR executives undertook overseas trips to recruit experienced mining engineers and to view techniques in asbestos mines and factories.⁶³ The company maintained an extensive Scientific and Technical Library to keep abreast of matters relating to CSR's various divisions, including asbestos mining. CSR also sent its management to mining and pneumoconiosis conferences. During the 1940s and 1950s, Keith Osborne Brown, Malcolm King and Cecil Broadhurst accumulated "hands on knowledge" of the conditions at Wittenoom, and subsequently achieved promotion to senior levels in the company.

The climate and working conditions at Wittenoom ensured a transient workforce. In the 1940s the company employed experienced Australian miners. These men had come to see the beauty of the Pilbara region, but were unimpressed by the working conditions and stayed only a few months.⁶⁴ In 1950 Displaced Persons from countries such as Hungary, Poland and Venezia Giulia (which had ceded to the then Yugoslavia) began to arrive in Wittenoom. They had come from crowded refugee camps in Europe and were being resettled under the International Refugee Organization agreement.⁶⁵ They were equally unhappy with the conditions but were forced to honour their two year contract. The need for experienced miners prompted CSR to recruit workers in Italy and Holland.⁶⁶ In 1951 thirty-five Italian miners had been recruited to work at Wittenoom; shocked by the working conditions, many left as quickly as possible.⁶⁷

⁶³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibits no. 10147: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) and no. 10241: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 - 30 June 1987). Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10166: Letter, from C.W.R. Powell, CEO of ABA Ltd, to the President of Johns-Manville, Mr. Crosby, 4 August 1944. 1944 saw the start of the business relationship between CSR/ABA and Johns-Manville develop, with correspondence indicating Johns-Manville interest in Australian blue asbestos.

⁶⁴ Williams, Op Cit.

⁶⁵ Gentilli, Stransky & Iraci, Op Cit. p. 98.

⁶⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1.

⁶⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's exhibits no. 10147: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive). See entry for 14 March 1951.

In its continued attempts to find workers CSR, through its subsidiary and the operator of the mine, ABA Limited, maintained regular communication with the Department of Immigration regarding Landing Permits for their Northern and Southern European recruits.⁶⁸ ABA Limited also went to the port of Fremantle to recruit migrants as they stepped off the ships.⁶⁹ News of the high earnings at Wittenoom spread by word of mouth, attracting those desperate for work. Once in Wittenoom, however, few stayed for an extended period unless they had a specific economic goal; enjoyed the freer lifestyle or had family in tow, as was the case with many Italian miners. Those who had brought their family were forced to remain longer than planned. Saving in order to repay debts made to bring the whole family to Wittenoom coupled with the high cost of living in the town made it more difficult than families had realized to save for a home, farm, business or repatriation to their homeland. Most, however, failed to tolerate the heat, the accommodation, the extreme dust created in the milling process or the cramped working conditions in the mine for more than a few months. The company did little to improve working conditions unless it led to improved productivity.

A.B.A Limited faced problems with dust control, ventilation, fibre purity, and an abrasive host rock which made equipment maintenance costly.⁷⁰ Improvements aimed at increasing production were also costly and only introduced when orders from the larger overseas corporations, such as Johns-Manville in the U.S., were assured.⁷¹ Production output increased gradually. In 1945 the target was 1,000 tons; by 1953 it had reached 4,000, peaking at 15,000 tons in 1962. Competitiveness with overseas mines, such as the South African blue asbestos mines would, however, pose a problem. Consequently CSR lobbied both State and Commonwealth governments for provision of subsidies, tax exemptions and in 1955 unsuccessfully applied to the Tariff Board for the introduction of tariffs on imported

⁶⁸ National Archives of Australia, Perth, Series number: PP6/1, Control Symbol 1950/H/7308, barcode 328406. Commonwealth Immigration Department – Western Australia. This file contains examples of correspondence between ABA Ltd and the Department of Immigration regarding pending worker arrivals and the cancellation of applications for the non-arrivals. It reveals ABA Ltd's efforts in the 1950s to secure workers for their mine.

⁶⁹ Interview with Marcus Cocker, Melbourne, March 2008. Volunteer, Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, Perth. Interview with Dr McNulty, Perth, November 2008.

⁷⁰ Musk et al. (1992), *Op Cit.* p. 737.

⁷¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-67 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom Asbestos Venture. See entries for August 1946, July 1950, September 1951, January 1952 and July 1958.

asbestos.⁷² Despite the parent company's overseeing the development of the mine by the use of share issues in ABA Limited to raise funds, the substantial investment in plant machinery and finally in the late 1950s the move to the Colonial mine and the construction of a new mill to increase production, CSR reported making a profit in only one year.⁷³

CSR had built Wittenoom's original mill with second-hand materials. The mill building had come from the Youanmi Gold Mine in the Midwest of Western Australia; the powerhouse was obtained from Whim Creek (located between Karratha and Port Hedland) and the crusher had come from Jaques, a Melbourne firm.⁷⁴ In the Hamersley Ranges, asbestos occurs in horizontal veins averaging half an inch [1.27 centimetres] in width, but can measure as much two inches [five centimetres], with several veins occurring over a total seam height of two feet [.6 of a metre]. The economic mining of such a narrow seam in extremely hard rock became the challenge. To develop a mining technique suitable to the Wittenoom conditions, CSR adapted the various methods the company's officers viewed during their visits to Canadian silver-lead mines, Rhodesian asbestos mines, South African diamond mines and an iron mine in Alabama, USA.⁷⁵ The milling process was never refined; it remained a dry mechanical process of crushing, grinding, and aspirating. Dust containment would always be an issue because the asbestos fibre was contained in a hard host rock which required crushing, creating clouds of dust.

In an effort to address the dust problem the company installed Rotoclone dust collecting units in its new Colonial mill. The dust problem would, however, remain unresolved. The dust units were made from tough manganese steel, but the hard and abrasive rock in which the fibre was found wore down the plant machinery after only 64 operating hours (8 shifts). The exhaust ducts required constant repairs because they wore

⁷² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) and Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10241: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 - 30 June 1987). Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10144: Tariff Board's Report on Asbestos Fibre, 24 March 1955.

⁷³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10147.00: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-67 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom Asbestos Venture. A profit of £31,941 was made before tax. See entry for 17 August 1949. In November 1952 the CSR Board decided that ABA Ltd should increase its paid up capital to CSR for the amount of advances made by way of loans and current account, and to take over the asbestos leases owned by CSR.

⁷⁴ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 75.

⁷⁵ Lowndes, Op Cit. p. 215.

down even more quickly, sending clouds of dust into the mill.⁷⁶ In the bagging section the pressing down of the fibre into secondhand jute sugar bags also created clouds of dust.⁷⁷ Workers covered in the dust became unrecognizable.⁷⁸ A wet method of dust control was tried, but it damaged the fibre by reducing its length; one of the fibre's qualities which appealed to manufacturers. This method was consequently discontinued.⁷⁹ Dust suppression was raised regularly by the Department of Health and in the Mines Inspectors' reports, but CSR was slow to respond or otherwise questioned the Inspectors' recommendations. Increased production took precedence over safety.

In 1958, in an attempt to raise the fibre output to 25,000 tons per annum by 1959, CSR had opened its new mill at Colonial Gorge, at a cost of £350,000 [\$700,000]. The company had transferred its mining operations there, with the depletion of the Wittenoom fibre.⁸⁰ The new mill operated under the direction of six A.B.A staff and a labour force of 68 men. By 1963 60 per cent were Italian; 25 per cent were Australian; and 15 per cent came from other nationalities.⁸¹ The mill operated six days a week, with one day off for plant maintenance. It was built on three separate levels. The primary level contained the picking belt where a team of six men hand-sorted the material. The ore then moved to the crusher where fibre separation commenced. The main process of dividing the fibre took place at the third and lowest level. The crushing section worked two shifts per day, crushing sufficient ore for the treatment section to conduct three shifts.⁸² Once extracted the asbestos was packed into 100 pound bags in grades according to its length. It was then transported to Roebourne for shipping to Fremantle, where the bags were stored awaiting shipment.⁸³ At the time of

⁷⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 8.

⁷⁷ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 77.

⁷⁸ Interview with Arturo Della Maddalena, Perth, December 2008.

⁷⁹ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 78.

⁸⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10147: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-67 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom Asbestos Venture. See entry for January 1957.

⁸¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 8.

⁸² Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd. (c. 1953). Report of Operations at Wittenoom Gorge W.A., p. 8. Battye Library, File no. PR 7591.

⁸³ Australian Blue Asbestos Limited (c.1953), Op Cit. p. 9.

Wittenoom's closure, along with local buyers, CSR had established markets in New Zealand, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North and South America and Asia.⁸⁴

The mine, located above the mill, consisted of four elevations. There was the main entrance (or adit) to access the workings, to transport broken ore and waste rock and for all services to the various sections of the mine. It was driven a total length of 3,000 feet (914 metres). Then there were the haulage levels whose primary function was for access and to transport broken ore from the stopes (working places). These were divided into the lower and upper seam stopes. Broken ore was hand shoveled (mucked) and then hauled by the scraper units to the ore chute. From there the ore was dumped into 100 cubic feet (30.5 cubic metres) dumping cars and hauled by locomotive to the ore transfer. The mine operated under the direction of 14 ABA staff and a labour force comprising 113 men.⁸⁵ Shifts in the mine were day and afternoon.

The mine too had its own set of problems regarding ventilation and working conditions. The eight hour shift spent bent over or on your knees in the 42 inch (70 centimetres) stope height was back breaking work. Miners regularly sustained deep gashes to their backs as they brushed against the rocky roofline. Ventilation would always be a problem because of reliance on the main entrance to provide it. The use of fans to supplement the limited ventilation proved ineffectual. Less dust was created in the mine, provided the men watered down the stope face before drilling. Nevertheless they were still exposed to large quantities because the mill dust was sucked back into the mine via its main entrance.

The occupational health and safety of employees was not a priority at Wittenoom, just as it had not been in the asbestos mines and factories of South Africa and Canada.

⁸⁴Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10205: Correspondence from C. H. Broadhurst Pro General Manager to Manager ABA Perth, 1 December 1966. Re: The companies which have been advised of the closure. They were local: NSW, Tasmania, Western Australia, Sydney, Melbourne and overseas: Belgium, Burma, Ceylon, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manila, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, Uganda, Uruguay, USA, Yugoslavia.

⁸⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 7.

The Failure of Regulation Internationally

In the face of mounting medical evidence outlining the hazards of asbestos and the growing number of occupationally and environmentally triggered cases of asbestos-related deaths, the asbestos industry managed nonetheless to frustrate attempts to ban its use until the latter years of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

Wagner's 1960 paper on mesothelioma, until then a rare disease, and four years later, Dr Irving Selikoff's New York conference on the "Biological Effects of Asbestos", with 300-400 leading scientists in attendance, had no effect on improving occupational health and safety in asbestos mines and factories, nor did they deter asbestos production. Instead, world production of the mineral increased. The impact on health took years to become widely known, providing little incentive for employers to improve worker safety.⁸⁷ Asbestos industrialists unwilling to acknowledge the issues the 1964 New York conference raised, but aware of it being commercially damaging, had generally shunned it.⁸⁸ The industry used their apologists to depict asbestos companies as blameless and questioned the opportunism of lawyers representing asbestos victims in mounting civil claims for damages.⁸⁹ They employed journalists, academics and scientists to put the alternative view of the benefits of asbestos and what they argued were inconsistent research results.⁹⁰

Asbestos mines provided the bulk of the profits for the major asbestos companies.⁹¹ To achieve this, these companies — Johns-Manville in North America, Turner & Newall in the U.K., and the three major Eternit groups: Eternit-Belgium, Eternit-Switzerland and Eternit-Denmark — supported each other through a network of anti-competitive marketing deals and price agreements, reminiscent of the cartels they had established in the interwar years.⁹² They had also gradually developed seemingly innocuous institutions to promote their reputations and the alternative medical opinions of those unconvinced of the health implications of asbestos exposure. Once the matter of asbestos-related-diseases became a

⁸⁶ McCulloch & Tweedale *Op Cit.* Chapters 3 & 4. Castleman, *Op Cit.*

⁸⁷ McCulloch & Tweedale, *Op Cit.* p. 50.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 84-86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 53, 96 & 109-118.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 37.

⁹² McCulloch & Tweedale, *Op Cit.* pp. 20-22 & 37-43. See also Castleman, *Op Cit.* pp. 839-57.

public issue, these proved the catalyst for many of the international corporations' defence and marketing strategies.⁹³ Insurance companies understood the potential economic fallout for their industry, but took precautions to protect only themselves.⁹⁴

Ironically the asbestos mines in Canada, the United States, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Southern Rhodesia or Corsica and CSR's Wittenoom mine tended to be in the picturesque locations.⁹⁵ Workers' families lived in the company towns near the mines and were exposed to the remnant tailings and dust created from the extraction process. In the cities, residents near asbestos factories experienced a similar fate.⁹⁶ Occupants of public buildings and private dwellings, along with trades people, dock workers and end users would also suffer from environmental exposure.⁹⁷ Workers, asbestos company executives and the public alike have fallen ill and died from ARDs.

Any attempt by workers, their widows or the public to seek compensation have met with opposition by asbestos companies. Johns-Manville's standard defence in the 1920s was that the worker's illness was due to the risks of employment and those risks were part of the terms of the contract agreed to by him.⁹⁸ Workers faced problems of low rates of pay, dangerous conditions and unyielding management. Technical factors made asbestos mining particularly hazardous, while the dry method of processing the fibre to preserve its physical characteristics resulted in high levels of dust. Rather than companies halting production (given the hazards to workers and end users) world production of some 3,000 products entered its fastest period of growth between 1960 and 1980.⁹⁹ In choosing to continue production and ignore the health warnings companies developed techniques "to calm public fears, frustrate legitimate claims for compensation, and placate regulatory authorities". Their strategies included the suppression of evidence of risk, intimidation of medical researchers and the circulation of favourable publicity. Furthermore the industry relied on the defence that medical discovery and the evidence about disease took decades to emerge. What they failed

⁹³ McCulloch & Tweedale, *Op Cit.* pp. 97-118.

⁹⁴ Castleman, *Op Cit.* pp. 246-249.

⁹⁵ McCulloch & Tweedale, *Op Cit.* pp. 20-22 & 37-43.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 33-37.

⁹⁷ McCulloch & Tweedale, *Op Cit.* Chapters 2 & 7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Chapter 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* pp.18-27 & 84.

to mention was their interference in the research process which had slowed down the emergence of the evidence and their vertical integration¹⁰⁰ which kept them abreast of what was happening at the various asbestos mines and factories with regard to the appearance of asbestos-related disease among workers.¹⁰¹

The counter arguments defending the benefits of asbestos and questioning the research results meant that its ban in Western countries took at least until 1999 in the U.K. and until 2005 in Europe. Chile, Brazil and Australia banned asbestos production a year or two earlier. In October 2012 the governments in Quebec and Ottawa ended their support for asbestos production at Quebec's Asbestos mine. They would no longer oppose international efforts to have chrysotile (white asbestos) declared a hazardous substance. Until 2010 Canada exported its chrysotile mainly to India, Vietnam and other developing countries.¹⁰² Canada's occupational health record is similar to that of other industrialised countries; despite its assurances of the investment of "much time, money, effort and human suffering learning to use asbestos safely".¹⁰³ As a member of the G8, Canada, with its access to forums such as World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization, had promoted asbestos. Asbestos manufacture continues in Russia, Africa, Asia and Latin America, where a wide range of cheap and durable products are made.¹⁰⁴

Litigation in Australia: CSR and James Hardie

Asbestos exposure at CSR and James Hardie's asbestos mines and in CSR, James Hardie and Wunderlich manufacturing plants has led to the deaths of many workers, their wives and children. Surviving families have faced the prospect of a difficult financial future.¹⁰⁵ As early as the 1930s but more particularly in the 1970s, the first victims who pursued common law claims were unsuccessful for three reasons: CSR and James Hardie contested victims'

¹⁰⁰ A company's ownership of both the asbestos mines and factories.

¹⁰¹ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. pp. 50-1.

¹⁰² Lak, Daniel, Aljazeera website (2012), 'Canada axes support for asbestos mining'. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/201210167129546890.html>, 17th October.

¹⁰³ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. pp. 152 & 225.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 226.

¹⁰⁵ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc., Op Cit. Peacock, M. (2009), *Killer Company: Bernie Banton's fight with James Hardie asbestos* (Sydney ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation).

claims; both companies prepared effective strategies to avoid damages payments; if either of those strategies failed the death of a plaintiff put paid to the court hearing or decreased the amount surviving family could receive.¹⁰⁶

For decades the James Hardie Company has either contested or gone to great lengths to avoid damages payments.¹⁰⁷ In 2001 the company moved offshore, having assured the NSW government that it would provide for future asbestos victims. James Hardie had established the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation (MRCF) to meet future asbestos claims.¹⁰⁸ The foundation was, however, more than a billion dollars short of funds.¹⁰⁹ With the revelation that the MRCF was bankrupt, in 2007 corporate regulator ASIC (Australian Securities and Investment Commission) charged the 2001 directors with breaching various sections of the Corporations Act 2001.¹¹⁰ In 2009 the company's seven non-executive directors were found guilty of breaching their duties as directors of the company and banned from public office for five years and each fined \$30,000. CEO Peter Macdonald was fined \$350,000 and banned for 15 years.¹¹¹ Their successful appeal in 2010 was eventually overturned. ASIC successfully appealed to the High Court in May 2012.¹¹² In November 2012 the term of the directors' disqualification had been halved on appeal.¹¹³ While many asbestos victims applied for compensation under the act, most people who developed a terminal disease chose not to face the trauma of court proceedings; others did not realise they could claim or did not know their condition was asbestos-related.¹¹⁴

In the case of early ABA compensation claimants, the award of damages was uncertain because of the few documents CSR or ABA Limited handed over during legal

¹⁰⁶ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. Hills, Op Cit. Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. Peacock (2009), Op Cit.

¹⁰⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10653: Department of Labour Worker's Compensation Act - Dangerous Industrial Processes and Disease Arising Therefore. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10654: Workers' Compensation Reports: pp. 129-132, In the Workers' Compensation Commission of New South Wales — Jones vs James Hardie and Co. Ltd, 1939. Peacock (2009), Op Cit.

¹⁰⁸ Peacock (2009), Op Cit, Chapter 10.

¹⁰⁹ Peacock (2009), Op Cit. p. 216.

¹¹⁰ Australian Securities and Investments Commission (2007b). 'ASIC Commences Proceedings Relating to James Hardie' [online], 15 February.

¹¹¹ Asbestos Diseases Foundation Newsfeed: www.adfa.org.au/news2012.htm#woodsreef page 3 "High Court Rules Directors of Asbestos Company James Hardier Mislead". Insurance Business online. 'James Hardie vs ASIC: monitor public statements or risk court wrath', 4 May 2012.

¹¹² Asbestos Diseases Foundation Newsfeed: www.adfa.org.au/news2012.htm#woodsreef page 3 "High Court Rules Directors of Asbestos Company James Hardie Mislead".

¹¹³ ABC NEWS, Monday 12 November 2012 3:38 p.m. AEDT, posted at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-12/hardie-directors-have-disqualifications-reduced/4367320>.

¹¹⁴ Peacock (2009), Op Cit. p. 87.

discovery. Yet by the late 1970s CSR had gathered 20,000 documents that related to Wittenoom. These were released only after several motions of inadequate discovery were brought against them in the Heys and Barrow case of 1988.¹¹⁵ In 1977 CSR Company Secretary Blaxland had concluded that their negligence could be established and could extend to a pre-1960 mesothelioma case.¹¹⁶ On legal advice, they hid behind Midalco's limited liability. Midalco (previously known as ABA Limited) had been stripped of its assets in 1975 but not liquidated. They would not have the money to pay an award of damages in the event of being sued.¹¹⁷

The first writ issued by a mesothelioma victim was that of Cornelius Maas in Western Australia in 1978. CSR and the SGIO (State Government Insurance Office) decided that to settle would be setting a dangerous precedent. They fought Maas's claim in an attempt to dissuade future claims. Unless Maas obtained a judgement before his death, his writ would founder. His wife would be entitled to an award under the Fatal Accidents Act, but this would be no greater than the benefit under the Workers' Compensation Act. Maas died two weeks after the issuing of his writ.¹¹⁸ A year later Joan Joosten, the ABA secretary in Wittenoom, developed mesothelioma. She issued a writ against Midalco.¹¹⁹ The judge ruled that the company had not been negligent. Joosten appealed to the Full Court of Western Australia in 1980, but died on the morning of the 10 March when her appeal was to be heard.¹²⁰ Discouraged by the Joosten decision, it would be several years and after the change to the Statute of Limitations legislation before a case was mounted against CSR in Western Australia. In 1983 under pressure from the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, the Western Australian Labour government made amendments to the Statute of Limitations: persons whose time for making a claim had expired received a further three years from 18 January 1984 in which to lodge a claim.¹²¹ For everyone else it was six years from the time

¹¹⁵ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 393.

¹¹⁶ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 386. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10647: Report on Asbestos Wittenoom, from Company Secretary J. F. Blaxland to General Manager, 29 April 1977.

¹¹⁷ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. pp. 378 & 388-397.

¹¹⁸ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. pp. 381-2. Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc., Op Cit. pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁹ ABA Limited had undergone a name change in 1975.

¹²⁰ Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc., Op Cit. pp. 14-15.

¹²¹ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit., p. 397.

they discovered they had an asbestos-related disease.¹²²

The first successful worker's claim for common law damages for an asbestos-related disease occurred in 1985 in the Victorian Supreme Court action of *Pilmer v. McPhersons Ltd.* Pilmer's award of \$270,000 damages prompted the Asbestos Diseases Society to approach his lawyers, Slater and Gordon, to bring other cases before the Western Australian courts. Their first case, *Simpson v. Midalco* in 1987, was unsuccessful. Pressure to abandon other claims was considerable because of the mounting costs from the Joosten and Simpson court losses. The ADSA and Slater and Gordon continued to represent plaintiffs.

In 1987 Slater and Gordon's Perth office issued some 400 claims for civil damages against Midalco and CSR. Most were on behalf of Wittenoom victims, since many of the writs related to the pre-1959 period when it was said Midalco had no insurance and by 1987 no assets. In an attempt to dissuade potential claimants, CSR press statements reminded Wittenoom victims of the lack of success of previous claims. Public suggestions that CSR was liable for the victims' damages claims met with threats of defamation proceedings.¹²³ CSR's secret strategy almost worked. The tide turned against them when in 1988 the *Rabenalt v. Midalco* case in Victoria was decided in favour of the plaintiff, Rabenalt. He was awarded compensatory damages of \$426,000 and punitive damages of \$250,000. CSR appealed, but the appeal court determined there was a clear case of "continuing, conscious and contumelious disregard" by ABA Limited for Rabenalt's right to be free of the risk of injury and disease.¹²⁴ Not long after, the Court of Appeal in the *Wally Simpson* case ordered a retrial, with CSR quickly settling. In the 1988 *Heys and Barrow* case CSR were ordered to present the 20,000 documents they held. Peter Heys died several months prior to and Barrow shortly after the successful decision was handed down in August.¹²⁵ By October 1988 someone within CSR leaked the company's secret strategy, paving the way for the settlement of the class action claims made in 1987 against Midalco and CSR.

Following the success of the class action in 1989, CSR announced they would never

¹²² Interview with John Gordon, barrister, Melbourne, July 2008.

¹²³ *Vojakovic & Gordon*, Op Cit. p. 405.

¹²⁴ *Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc.*, Op Cit. pp. 14-21.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 14-21. The case had taken 180 days.

pay damages for environmental asbestos exposure. The company, which had changed lawyers, unsuccessfully employed similar delaying tactics to deter environmental exposure claimants. Courts would award substantial damages to the children and wives about to die of mesothelioma. CSR went so far as to appeal to the High Court of Australia to refuse a statutory compensation payment to the widow of a former CSR fitter and turner. The three judges did not even leave the bench in order to dismiss CSR's application.¹²⁶ As of March 2000 CSR had paid out in excess of A\$100 million in settlements and legal fees in the U.S., while in Australia by 2006, the payout was in excess of A\$ 500 million in damages and compensation.¹²⁷

Conclusion

Despite the extensive international literature on the health dangers of asbestos exposure, including the Australian Commonwealth government's own listing of asbestos as health hazard in 1922, Commonwealth and state governments supported the development of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine.

CSR's lack of expertise in asbestos mining and their control of ABA Limited are evident in the CSR Board meetings minutes. At its discretion, CSR directed the development of the mine: the amount of expenditure for the day-to-day running of the operation, the search overseas for appropriately qualified mining executives to run Wittenoom, and the education of their personnel through visits to asbestos mines and factories in North America, Europe and Africa, which those countries reciprocated.

The accumulated knowledge resulting from CSR's international asbestos network, the first hand Wittenoom experience of three senior CSR executives (K. O. Brown, Malcolm King and Cecil Broadhurst) employed between the mid 1930s and the 1970s, as well as CSR's extensive technical and scientific library, provided the CSR and ABA Limited hierarchy with the latest information about the hazards of asbestos and asbestos-related diseases. Yet they ignored the dangers, as did James Hardie Industries Limited. Both companies sought to

¹²⁶ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 407-8.

¹²⁷ McCulloch (2006), Op Cit. p. 15.

avoid liability for the injuries they caused their employees and the consumers of their products. In May 2012 the High Court's overturning of James Hardie's appeal against its directors' guilty finding, for breaching their duty as directors, acknowledges the duty of care companies owe to their employees. CSR's management was never called to answer for their lack of duty of care, despite the anonymous disclosure of CSR's secret defence strategy in 1988.

The health consequences and financial burden to CSR's early asbestos victims who failed in early litigation writs were considerable. They and subsequent victims in the 1989 class action were only compensated because of the persistence of their legal representatives to have handed over the thousands of documents whose existence CSR had denied during the course of legal discovery. Nevertheless the onus for asbestos victims to prove the legitimacy of their claim, given the short life expectancy of a year, is daunting. This situation has prompted out of court settlements for smaller damages payments than may have otherwise been determined in a court of law.

Chapter Two - A Tradition of Storytelling: Collecting the Stories from the Inside

When deciding what to write about, remember that you must *really* care about your topic, and there should be a reasonable chance that others will care about it too... Your own personal experiences will also influence your topic choices. We all come to history in different ways, usually a combination of the broader concerns of our own times, and our own particular life experiences.¹

Curthoys and McGrath's reflection on the motivations for writing history encapsulates why, in 2007, I would be drawn to undertake research on the Italian migrants at Wittenoom. My experiences as the child of Italian migrants underpinned my desire to tell and reframe my own family's migration story vicariously through that of the Wittenoom Italians. My Italian background and life experience have given me several skills to undertake the task and helped me to establish a connection more readily with the research participants. An intimate understanding of Italian culture, 30 or so years as a secondary teacher, a five year stint in real estate, and my subsequent career as a trained counsellor have provided me with the ability to listen actively and with empathy. I was able to engage sensitively in conversation with people who have lost loved ones or friends to asbestos-related disease or live with the fear that they could develop and die from the asbestos-related disease, mesothelioma.²

This research aims to give these marginalized people a voice and to determine the impact of the Wittenoom asbestos mine on their lives. These aims inform my choice of methodology. I have combined an oral history approach, the use of documentary evidence supplied by North Carolina lawyer, Motley Rice, photographs, my own archival searches and secondary sources to write the Wittenoom Italians social history within the context of transnational migration and asbestos mining. Interestingly, the time I spent with the Wittenoom Italians highlighted the generally different style of storytelling between the men and the women, in similar ways to those reported elsewhere in research on gender and

¹ Curthoys, A. & McGrath, A. (2009), *How To Write History That People Want To Read* (Sydney: UNSW Press), pp. 14-15.

² My interviews with Italians who remained in Western Australia often combined English with Italian. I italicise the Italian for this reason. Where Italian was predominantly used I have usually translated participants' accounts where they have been lengthy and would have disturbed the reading flow.

memory.³ Apart from the family photographs participants allowed me to photograph and one late ex-miner's letter published in a popular history of his hometown in Italy, none of the participants reported having kept any letters or written diaries which recorded their life experiences in Italy or Australia.⁴ They have relied on their memory and the stories they tell each other when reminiscing about the past.

The men and women's preference for storytelling is linked to the tradition of folk narrative mentioned by Alessandro Portelli, in much the same way that indigenous peoples have an oral tradition.⁵ The Wittenoom Italians, like all working class Italians, had been born into a generation and social class with limited access to education.⁶ In contrast, my birth in Australia during the 1950s set me on a path to multiple educational opportunities, providing me with the skills to record the Wittenoom Italians' social history. As the participants told their stories during fieldwork interviews, my own family's experiences hovered metaphorically in the background. Had we been in a counselling session I would have argued from my experience as a counsellor that transference and counter-transference were at play. Many of the experiences the storytellers described triggered similar emotions in me and memories of comparable experiences.⁷ My counselling skills helped me to "hold the space" during the participants' recounting of painful memories.

The Design and Conduct of the Fieldwork

Preparing for the Fieldwork

My aim has been to design a research approach which facilitated my relationship with participants, considered the ethics of my engagement with them to determine the most

³ See, for example, Ely, R. & McCabe, A. (1996), 'Gender Differences in Memories for Speech', in Leydesdorff, S., Passerini, L., & Thompson, P. (eds.), *Gender and Memory* (International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, IV; Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴ Covelli et al., Op Cit. p. 127-128.

⁵ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 99. Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999), *Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects', Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press).

⁶ The Wittenoom Italians were born from around the end World War 1 and then throughout the decades of the 20th century until the 1960s. See Reeder, L. (1998), 'Women in the classroom: Mass migration, literacy and the nationalization of Sicilian women at the turn of the century', *Journal of Social History*, 32 (1), pp. 101-124 for a discussion of the introduction of compulsory primary education at the turn of the 20th century in Italy.

⁷ For a discussion on these concepts see Jacoby, M. (1984), *The Analytic Encounter. Transference and Human Relationship* (Canada: Inner City Books).

sensitive way of obtaining their narratives, and make relevant use of the Motley Rice documents, along with those I would obtain from archival searches. From there followed the fieldwork; finding the participants would prove akin to detective work. The surviving Wittenoom Italians were situated in Perth and Italy, while I was in Melbourne thousands of kilometres away. The search involved a circuitous, serendipitous and often synchronistic path to their doors, providing the rich data which inform this thesis.

Early in my candidature I decided to focus on the impact of the Wittenoom asbestos mine from the perspective of the Italian transnational workers. I would reconstruct aspects of the lives of these immigrants and their families before, during and after their time at Wittenoom. Once I had made the decision to speak to ex-Wittenoom workers and residents and others involved in the Wittenoom tragedy to ascertain Wittenoom's role in their lives and deaths, my choice of approach gravitated to an oral history one. My method would be semi-structured interviews. I would also examine the Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits I had at my disposal. These might shed new light on what was known at that time regarding asbestos-related diseases and other matters related to Wittenoom's history. I found the number of documents to be read daunting and the task made more onerous by the fact that they were in no discernible order. In time I would order them chronologically, to allow me to weave them through the participants' stories.

In addition to these documents, during my first year I planned to conduct archival and library searches to see what other documents and texts I might find. In Melbourne there were the State Records Office in North Melbourne, the library of the Italian Historical Society in Carlton and the library and archives of the Italian Australian Institute in McLeod. By August 2008 I had also made arrangements with Gary Billingham in the Perth Office of the National Archives of Australia to view files relating to Wittenoom during my visit to Perth. I also wanted to visit the State Record Office to search the files of the Department of Mines, as well as the Battye Library, located in the State Library of Western Australia.

On the advice of my supervisors, I made initial contact with two key people: Dr Enzo Merler, an Italian researcher who had transcripts of interviews he had conducted with 130 repatriated Wittenoom Italians, which I hoped to access. He would eventually supply me with

the names of 22 ex-workers. I also rang Robert Vojakovic, the president of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, in Perth. While he could not supply me with names, for confidentiality reasons, he told me of two annual events organized by the ADSA in Perth where I could be introduced to ex-Wittenoom workers and their families: the Ecumenical Service held in November, and the ADSA picnic at Whiteman Park, north of Perth held in early December. I also contacted several academics in Perth and in Italy.

I left for Italy in late October, 2008. I would spend three weeks in the northern Italian regions of Lombardy, Trentino Alto Adige and Veneto contacting and meeting with several of those on Dr Merler's list. I then returned to Australia. I stopped in Perth where I would spend a further three weeks looking for participants and carrying out archival searches. During the course of the next three years, constrained by finances, I would confine my travel to Perth for three week visits to follow up potential leads or revisit participants I had met previously. In 2010 I visited Perth twice. I had finally decided that I should see Wittenoom for myself, despite my concerns regarding asbestos exposure. This concern was mediated by the presence of Emilia Oprandi who had expressed interest in seeing where her father had started out his life in Australia. She is the daughter of the late Attilio Oprandi, one of first group of miners recruited for Wittenoom who arrived there in February 1951 from Lombardy.

Tracking Down the Storytellers: A Detective's Approach

The tracking down of the storytellers is a story in itself. In the early stages of my search for participants, despite my concern that I would not find many Italians, I came to enjoy the search as much as the time I spent with those who would agree to take part in this research. In my initial planning I had had no idea how many ex-Wittenoom Italians I would actually meet; some 50 years had passed since the mine's closure in 1966, and the mortality rate was predicted to be over 40 per cent of workers by 2020. In Western Australia one participant told me that I had arrived too late because those with the stories had all died. This may, in part, explain the number of ex-Wittenoom Italians — 27 in total — I eventually located in Perth and Italy.

During 2008, 2009 and 2010, I would meet with 36 ex-Wittenoom workers, wives, children and surviving family members who had never been to Wittenoom — six in Italy in

2008 and the remaining 30 in Perth during my four field trips. They provided firsthand accounts, anecdotes and photographs to illustrate their or their deceased loved ones' experiences. I also spoke with several Italians who had never emigrated to get a sense of what life was like in Italy for those who had stayed behind. In Western Australia I approached two doctors: Dr Jim McNulty, who had been directly involved in the discussions between the departments of Mines and Health during Wittenoom's operation and Professor Bill Musk at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital who treats asbestos victims and monitors the health of surviving ex-Wittenoom workers and residents and others suffering environmental exposure. I also established contact with barrister John Gordon who has represented many involved in asbestos-related damages claims and ADSA volunteer, Marcus Cocker. My initial fear that participants would prove difficult to find faded as I followed up leads — these often coming from the most unexpected and unrelated places or situations. I would meet about one third of participants on more than one occasion.

Between December 2007 and June 2008 I had made contact with the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia in Perth and eventually Dr Enzo Merler in Italy. It had taken several phone calls before I actually spoke with ADSA president, Robert Vojakovic. My visits to the society's Perth office in 2008, 2009 and 2010 provided me with the reason: a waiting-room full of asbestos victims and their family members, anxious to meet with him, his wife Rose Marie Vojakovic or one of the other ADSA staff to discuss how the ADSA could help them with their medico/legal matters relating to Workers Compensation and Common Law damages claims.⁸ At Robert Vojakovic's suggestion I had planned my visit to Perth between late November and early December 2008, during Asbestos Awareness Week. I attended the ADSA's two annual events: the Ecumenical Memorial Service — held to remember those who have died of an asbestos-related disease — and their annual picnic. I attended the Ecumenical Service again in 2010 during my final fieldwork visit to Perth. At these events I met several Italians with whom I would arrange subsequent meetings to record their stories.

During the preparations for my fieldwork, finding Dr Enzo Merler had turned out to be not so straight forward. A search of the Internet ultimately led me to Dr. Merler via Professor

⁸ Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc., Op Cit. p.6.

Claudio Bianchi, who works at the Center for the Study of Environmental Cancer, Italian League against Cancer at the Hospital of Monfalcone, in Northern Italy. Bianchi would also provide me with a paper written on an ex-Wittenoom worker — in Wittenoom between 1955 to 1958 — who had died in the mid 1980s from peritoneal, rather than pleural mesothelioma, after his repatriation to Italy.⁹ The first few email discussions with Dr Merler seemed promising with regard to obtaining access to his interview transcripts of 130 ex-Wittenoom workers. In the end, however, it proved too difficult; instead Merler gave me the names of 22 northern Italians who had gone to Wittenoom.

Many unexpected and serendipitous events led me to the Italian ex-Wittenoom residents and workers in Italy and Perth, with some contacts originating from the most unlikely of places in Melbourne too. To everyone with whom I spoke or met by chance, I would bring the conversation around to my research. This would prove fruitful during the three years of my fieldwork particularly in Perth. In Italy, during what turned out to be my only trip, contacting the 22 men on the list yielded mixed results: about one third of the phone numbers were disconnected; possibly due to the death of the person. One irate wife was neither interested in my research nor her deceased husband: “*Era un cafone!*” she told me and hung up.¹⁰ Two of the surviving ex-miners were old, deaf and with failing memories. Their daughters or wives explained they did not want to talk to me. Yet my persistence paid off, as my phone calls and requests for an appointment led to meetings in their homes. Three men were in the Valtellina, in northern Lombardy. The son of one of the first miners recruited from the Seriana valley of Lombardy I located in Bergamo. He gave me my first contact in Perth and a copy of a book which he had co-authored on the migration history of his townspeople in Fino del Monte.¹¹ Another of the 22 ex-miners lived in Vermiglio, in the Trentino Alto Adige. He had heard about Wittenoom from his uncle, Attilio Slanzi, who had also worked there.¹² In the Veneto region I would make contact with the wife of a deceased miner who had taken her and their two Australian-born little girls to Wittenoom. From the list

⁹ Pizzolitto, Barillari & De Cesare, Op Cit. pp. 57-70.

¹⁰ He was a cad! (In Australia we would call him a bastard).

¹¹ Covelli et al, Op Cit.

¹² Slanzi was mentioned in Hills Op Cit. Chapter 4.

of 22, I had made contact with four ex-miners and the wife and son of two other ex-miners both of whom were deceased, but not from an asbestos-related disease.

The follow up trip to Italy did not eventuate. Realistically, to find more of the repatriated Wittenoom Italians would have required my travelling the length of the peninsula and into Sicily and I had neither the time which that would take nor the funds for such fieldwork. It made more sense to channel my energies into Perth, where I could concentrate the search on specific areas where two thirds of the Wittenoom Italians had settled and where the question “Do you know of anyone who went to Wittenoom?” was more likely to yield a positive response.

For my 2008 visit to Italy I had organized two bases from which to conduct my fieldwork: Cesano Maderno, 30 minutes from Milan in the Lombardy region and Verona, one of the main provincial cities of the Veneto region. Both are major centres linking the Italian rail network in the north. It was in these two regions that most of the 22 workers on Merler’s list were living, with the exception of one who lived in the neighbouring Trentino Alto Adige region. My efforts to locate them commenced from the homes of my two generous hosts: Emilia Pagani in Cesano Maderno and Bruna Farenzena in Verona; both friends I made during my previous trips to Italy. Emilia was surprised to hear where my prospective participants lived. She had a friend who often travelled to Vermiglio, in the Trentino Alto Adige, while one of her sons travelled regularly for work to the Valtellina area of Lombardy, the provenance of several of the repatriated Italians on my list. It was during my stay in Vermiglio at the Albergo Milano that Monica Longhi, the daughter of the hotel’s owner told me about the recorded history of Vermiglio written by the town’s retired teacher and former mayor, Luigi Panizza.¹³ Interestingly, there is only one sentence about the town’s residents going to Western Australia, and yet nine of the town’s men, eight of whom had died of an asbestos-related disease, had been recruited to go to Wittenoom.¹⁴

Despite the many unexpected and serendipitous events which led me to other ex-Wittenoom Italians, I nonetheless experienced moments of despondency, as some leads

¹³ Panizza, L. (2005), *Vermiglio Ieri e Oggi* (Trento: Nuove Arti Grafiche).

¹⁴ Hills, Op Cit. Chapter 4. I provided Prof. Panizza with an Italian translation of this chapter, which I completed while in Vermiglio, Italy in November 2008.

came to nought. My research aim: to give the Wittenoom Italians a voice, motivated me to continue. In Perth I wanted to speak with Dr Jim McNulty, who had played a key role in the closure of Wittenoom and to Professor Bill Musk, an expert in the field of asbestos-related diseases at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. I had written to McNulty requesting to speak with him while in Perth, but had had no answer. I was hesitant to ring him, thinking he was not interested. In the meantime, the name of another West Australian researcher, Criena Fitzgerald, had been suggested to me. An email to her produced two resources: the transcripts of interviews she had conducted with Dr. Jim McNulty in 2002 and the information that Bill Musk was her husband and that I should “speak with Bill too when you come to Perth”. I would meet both these men.

In July 2008, I also met John Gordon, now a barrister in Melbourne. He has played an important role in obtaining damages for the Wittenoom asbestos victims. Gordon had been a young law student when he first became involved with asbestos victims. He eventually worked on the class action undertaken in Perth in 1989. In the course of telling me his story, he mentioned Matt Peacock’s 1977 publication on asbestos and a book section he had co-authored with Robert Vojakovic in 1995. Both proved informative reading, with more information about CSR’s role in the Wittenoom tragedy and other asbestos topics.¹⁵ In June 2011 I would visit John Gordon for a second time. He provided me with the information he had regarding CSR’s proposed demerger process and what asbestos support organizations were doing to ensure that CSR would provide funds for the damages claims of future asbestos victims.

There is not enough space to recount all the events which led me to those who finally participated in this research; I recount a few to illustrate their serendipitous nature. The leads for Wittenoom workers came from the most unlikely contacts, even in Melbourne. In mid 2008 I was to have dinner with two friends, Kerri Stewart from my counselling training days and Yolanda Pannuccio (of Italian origin) whom I had met through Kerri. As it turned out, Yolanda had had to decline the invitation due to the arrival of her cousin, Saro Condo, from

¹⁵ Peacock, M. (1978), *Asbestos - work as a health hazard* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission in association with Hodder and Stoughton). Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit.

Perth. I asked Kerri the obvious question: “Can you ask Yolanda if her cousin knows of any Italians who went to Wittenoom?” A few days later, the came reply: “Yes, he does”. Yolanda gave me her cousin’s phone number, with the invitation to ring him once I arrived in Perth in November. This simple question led me to one of Perth’s most successful Italian restaurateurs, Giacomo Bevacqua. He had gone to Wittenoom to work as a miner in the late 1950s and by the early 1960s was running Wittenoom’s Single Men’s mess with his wife.

In 2010 a chance meeting with Father Jo Dirks, the RMIT Roman Catholic chaplain provided me with another lead. Thanks to his Perth-based sister I located the Island of Elba Italians. From the story of the Island of Elba contacts who had arrived in Wittenoom in May 1951, I realized that the first Italians to go to Wittenoom were in fact among the Displaced Persons sent to Wittenoom as part of the International Refugee Organization resettlement plan in mid 1950. This was prior to the Seriana Valley miners of Lombardy who arrived in Wittenoom in February 1951 (whom I located during my 2008 visit to Perth) and the Vermiglio Italians (mentioned in Hills’ *Blue Murder*) who arrived in April of 1951.¹⁶

My last contact in Italy, Severino Scandella, the son of one of the first Italian miners recruited to Wittenoom, provided me with my first contact in Perth. He was another of the Seriana Valley miners, Attilio Oprandi. Severino had told me that Oprandi had gone to Wittenoom with his father, Evaristo Scandella, in the early 1950s. If anyone could tell me about Wittenoom, it would be Attilio Oprandi, Severino had assured me. I would finally speak with Attilio’s son, Frank (Francesco) because Attilio had passed away a few years earlier. Frank explained that he personally had never been to Wittenoom. The person to speak to was Lina Tagliaferri who had spent many years in Wittenoom with her family. She would have lots of stories to tell. Her husband had been recruited along with Attilio Oprandi and Evaristo Scandella. Frank gave me Lina Tagliaferri’s number. The call would lead to visits with her in 2008 and again in 2009 and 2010. I would also speak with her daughter Maria Scali. Lina eventually shared that she had only agreed to speak with me because I spoke Italian and was a daughter of Italian migrants. The link with the Oprandi family had also held some sway, as I would find out in 2009.

¹⁶ Hills, Op Cit.

At the Western Australian Royal Historical Society Office, during archival searches on Wittenoom, I found several articles which mentioned an Italian couple, Umberto Favero and Vera Yugolano.¹⁷ From one article it was apparent they had stayed in Wittenoom until the 1990s. When I mentioned their names to Loretta Baldassar, she suggested I ask her father, Angelo, about them. He was a member of the Laguna Italian club in Dianella and played *bocce* there regularly with other Italians. In conversation with Loretta's mother, Betty, I learned that there was a member at the club who had been to Wittenoom and that she would follow it up for me. I also attended the Ecumenical Memorial Service at the Redemptorist Monastery in North Perth. The monastery was filled with people; most of whom appeared to be in their thirties, forties and fifties. There were family members, friends, politicians, doctors, solicitors. One woman in her thirties seated near me was sobbing. ADSA president Robert Vojakovic announced that 190 people had died of an asbestos-related disease since the previous year's service. Afterwards I met a number of people, including Robert and Rose Marie Vojakovic.

A week later I attended the annual ADSA picnic at Whiteman Park. It was here that Peter Della Maddalena, who works at the ADSA, introduced me to his father, Arturo, originally from the Valtellina where I had been three weeks earlier. Arturo introduced me to other ex-Wittenoom Italians: Paolo Del Casale from Vasto in the Abruzzo region who had lost a brother to mesothelioma and Alvaro Giannasi whose father had worked in the mill. Alvaro agreed to see me before my return to Melbourne. Arturo was available the next day and brought along two other ex-miners. I also met Marcus Cocker who does volunteer work for the ADSA.

During my last night in Perth Angelo Baldassar informed me that he played *bocce* with Umberto Favero, the man I had read about during my searches at the Western Australian Royal Historical Society. He would speak with Umberto about my research next time he was at the club. I left Perth with the stories of seven more ex-Wittenoom residents (in addition to the six I had met in Italy) and the possibility of speaking to two more. By February

¹⁷ Vera Yugolano was the name by which she had become known because people in Australia in the 1930s — when her parents had come to Western Australia — anglicised foreign names. She now goes by her given name and surname: Venera Uculano.

2009 Angelo Baldassar had arranged for me to speak with Umberto Favero and Vera Yugolano by phone. During my subsequent visits to Perth, Venera Uculano, the de-anglicized version her name, and Umberto Favero displayed the warm hospitality one would expect to receive had one been a family member or long time friend. They regaled me with stories about Wittenoom which revealed their enduring love for the place where they had spent forty years of their lives. Sadly, Umberto passed away in July 2011.

I would return to Perth on three more occasions during which time I met 21 other participants.

Collecting the Stories from the Inside

Similarly to Tuhiwai Smith's findings in which indigenous researchers much more readily elicit stories from their indigenous participants, my disclosure that I am a child of Italian immigrants, aided by my personality, allowed the establishment of our rapport much more readily than if I had been an academic seeking to interview them.¹⁸ Underpinning my Italian migrant background and ability to speak Italian were other skills I had honed during my counselling training which facilitated my rapport with participants. They are the facilitative psychological attitudes described by psychologist Carl Rogers as genuineness, unconditional positive regard or acceptance, and empathic understanding.¹⁹

As a rapport developed between myself and the participants based on my respect for their stories and the acknowledgement of the common Italian heritage we shared, our time together, rather than being a semi-structured interview became a conversation: an exchange of stories. In preparation for my fieldwork I had also considered Portelli 's advice: "the content of the oral source depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, stimuli, dialogue, personal relationship of mutual trust or detachment".²⁰ Accordingly, I had

¹⁸ Tuhiwai Smith, Op Cit.

¹⁹ Rogers, C. (1959), 'A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework', in S. Koch (ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science. Formulations of the person and the social context*. (3; New York: McGraw Hill). This approach is based on the notion of accepting a client's story unconditionally, to listen and ask for clarification or to reword a client's account to ensure the counsellor has understood it. Academically, this approach ensures that, as Scott sought to do with his criteria to determine the quality of the data based on authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (see page 59 of this thesis), a participant's account is understood (meaning) and reported accurately (authenticity), rather than as an interviewer's interpretation of the events.

²⁰ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 103.

prepared by reading as much of the literature on Wittenoom and Italian migration as I could to complement what I already knew from my family and my own migration experiences. From my perspective, I behaved as I would normally in initiating a conversation with a stranger: I found common ground from which stories rich in detail often emerged. I had felt from the outset that self-disclosure would contribute positively to the establishment of a positive rapport with participants.

Self-disclosure is nevertheless a contentious issue. Those in the counselling field, for example, diplomatically avoid it, should it arise, taking the focus back to the client's issues to maintain a professional distance. Research literature shows that social scientists have differing opinions about self-disclosure. Bryman and Fontana and Frey discourage it, while historian Alistair Thomson incorporated it in his interviewing technique to elicit dialogue rather than monologue.²¹ For the indigenous researcher Tuhiwai Smith, as it is for me as a child of Italian immigrants, it is inherent in our backgrounds to speak about our cultural heritage. Ethically nevertheless it is incumbent upon the researcher to maintain an awareness of the power he/she holds in the interview dynamic and be alert to the underlying pressure a participant may feel as a result of the nature of the disclosure.

As part of the interview and Ethics process, each participant was given the Plain Language Statement with the attached consent form (both of which I had prepared in English and Italian).²² To illustrate their stories I asked their permission to take copies of any photographs, documents, letters or diary entries they might have. To be able to review our time together, I requested permission to record our interview, which I subsequently translated and transcribed. In an attempt to avoid leading the participant and to address the issue of ethical sensitivity, each interview, in the first instance, was conducted using open ended requests or questions along the lines of "Talk to me about what you remember of your life in Italy". "What impressions do you recall upon your arrival in Australia?" "In Wittenoom?" "Talk to me about your life in Wittenoom." "What was life like after you left Wittenoom?"

²¹ Bryman, A. (2004), *Social Research Methods* (2nd edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 22. Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. (2000), 'The interview: from structured questions to negotiated text', in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn.; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications). Thomson, A. (1998), 'ANZAC memories: putting popular memory into practice in Australia', in Perks, R. & Thomson, A. (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge), p. 302.

²² I received ethics approval from RMIT in October 2008.

The issue of ethical sensitivity surfaced on several occasions during my fieldwork. If stories needed to be further unpacked and, provided the participants appeared willing, I would add a comment such as “That sounds interesting”, or the question “Is there anything else you can remember about that?” If possible, I arranged a follow up session to clarify any issues which may have arisen from our first meeting. My approach reminded me of my family’s weekend visits to friends and family. Participants and I shared amusing family stories, mentioned absent family members or what had gone on in the news that day, which sometimes triggered the recounting of some or other event of interest in their lives relating to their migration experience.

The hospitality I was afforded by many of the participants was for me a further confirmation of their acceptance of me. What was intended to be an hour appointment often became two and sometimes more hours. When I sought to bring our time to a close, in the belief I had overstayed my welcome, I was often met with what seemed to me a genuine invitation to stay a little longer, to stay for lunch or another cup of coffee and eat more of the *dolci* which they had put on the table. In the meantime, they remembered, reminisced, and sometimes openly displayed the grief they still felt for the loss of a loved one or the fear they harboured about their and their family’s health. They all knew someone or of someone who had died from asbestos exposure in Wittenoom, or from environmental exposure elsewhere.

My counselling training allowed me to “hold the space” when content of an emotional nature surfaced.²³ The skills of active listening and empathy facilitated the sharing of stories “whose existence and relevance were previously unknown to [me] the researcher and...not contemplated in the question schedule”.²⁴ Part of the Wittenoom Italians’ healing process, as I knew from my counselling background, involved telling their story, having it validated and recorded in some way: in short being listened to, without being judged, and having their stories legitimised.

²³ “Holding the space” meant just nodding in acknowledgement, sitting and listening and waiting for the participant to continue, or deciding it was best to gently bring the conversation to a close when it was apparent the person could not continue.

²⁴ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 103.

The Use of Oral, Documentary and Visual Evidence: Considerations

From the outset of my research, I felt it was most important to give the Wittenoom Italians a voice — to allow them to tell their own stories. This is, accordingly, a social history of the Wittenoom Italians which Maynes, Pierce and Laslett would describe as originating “from below”. “Central to its construction is the use of people’s articulated self-understandings ...personal narratives...to introduce [their] marginalized voices...to work from an empirical base that is more inclusive.”²⁵ There are strengths in oral histories which official accounts do not have, even if as Maynes, Pierce and Laslett caution “narrators of life stories...should be regarded as privileged but not definitive observers of their own historical contexts”.²⁶ For this very reason, there was a place for the Motley Rice Plaintiffs’ Exhibits and other archival research to fill in the gaps in the history of Wittenoom “from above”, which the participants could not provide.

Since the 1970s, those involved in oral history have been engaged in debates on the nature and reliability of memory in personal narratives.²⁷ Whose memory is it, the storyteller’s or someone else’s? Is the memory influenced by anecdotal accounts or other information consciously or unconsciously internalised by storytellers? Is the memory accurate? Has the narrator intentionally left things out, if so what is that telling us? What do silences reveal? Are oral sources, as Curthoys and McGrath posit, merely indications of subjectivity, of feelings and ideas about the past seen through the lens of the present?²⁸ Or is it as Maynes, Pierce and Laslett contend that “personal narratives are contextualised by, reflect on, and explore the individual’s place in collective events and historical time” when given the opportunity by

²⁵ Maynes, M., Pierce, J. L., & Laslett, B. (2008), *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (New York: Cornell University Press), p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 45.

²⁷ Curthoys & McGrath, Op Cit. p. 91. See for example Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, Op Cit. Perks, R. & Thomson, A. (eds.) (2006), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn., London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group), Ritchie, D. A. (2003), *Doing Oral History* (2nd edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press). Leyesdorff, S., Passerini, L., & Thompson, P. (eds.) (1996), *Gender and Memory* (International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, IV; Oxford: Oxford University Press). Samuel, R. & Thompson, P. (eds.) (1990), *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge). Passerini, L. (1987), *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Portelli, (1981), Op Cit. Thompson, P. (1978), *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁸ Curthoys & McGrath, Op Cit. p. 91.

the researcher to historicize their lives?²⁹ Both viewpoints are plausible. In the case of several participants, their stories of Wittenoom have blurred with the revelations which surfaced much later regarding what the asbestos industry had known about asbestos hazards. By contrast, others have been able to distinguish their lives as they were then from the historical information with which they now contextualise their experiences.

Should we accept Portelli's summation that oral testimony will never be the same twice? While the participants in this research, whom I visited on more than one occasion, may not have told their stories in exactly the same fashion, common threads nonetheless appeared in their retelling one and two years later; particularly their descriptions of the life and conditions in Wittenoom. Portelli nevertheless rightly argues that interviews, even if they can be continued, will always be inherently incomplete because the data collected will always be the result of a selection produced by the mutual relationship between the researcher and the participant at a particular point in time.³⁰

With these considerations in mind, Bryman and Burgess' caution to qualitative researchers that "it is always essential...to bear in mind that the data available for analysis are only as good as the data that are recorded" is warranted.³¹ Who and how does one decide about the quality of data: the oral, the visual and the written? To critically assess the use of documents, Bryman uses a set of criteria developed by Scott to determine the quality of the data based on authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.³² The various positions of historians and sociologists with regard to these four criteria, both within and across these two disciplines, suggest how contentious an issue the use of personal narratives has been in academia, and the apparent superior quality of the written word.³³ Yet if rigour in the writing of a history is to be achieved then Portelli's caution needs to be considered.

²⁹ Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, *Op Cit.* pp. 43-4.

³⁰ Portelli (1981), *Op Cit.* p. 104.

³¹ Bryman, A. & Burgess, R. G. (1999), 'Qualitative research methodology: A review', in Bryman, A. & Burgess, R. G. (eds.), *Fundamental Issues in Qualitative Research* (1; London: Sage), p. xxi.

³² Bryman, A. (2004), *Social Research Methods* 2nd edn; (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 381. Scott, J. (1990), *A Matter of Record* (Cambridge: Polity), p.6.

³³ See, for example, Bryman & Burgess, *Op Cit.* Portelli (1981), *Op Cit.* Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, *Op Cit.*

Written and oral sources are not mutually exclusive. They have common characteristics as well as autonomous and specific functions which only either one can fill (or which one set of sources fills better than the other); therefore, they require different and specific interpretative instruments. But the undervaluing and the overvaluing of oral sources end up by cancelling out *specific* qualities, turning them either into mere supports for traditional written sources or into an illusory cure for all ills.³⁴

Historians and sociologists have gone some way in clarifying the arguments for the place and the various functions of individual storytelling and the use of documentary evidence in the reconstruction of events located in historically specific times and settings. These arguments provide the necessary scaffolding for researchers to position their findings and to approach their analyses. Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, for example, use a range of empirical studies to outline the issues which one needs to consider to make sense of personal narratives: agency and the potential for the individual to have also acted in other ways; the subjectivity of an individual's motivation to act; the intersubjectivity between the analyst and storyteller; the positioning of personal narratives in a specific historical context and the various narrative genres employed by a storyteller, embedded in their particular storytelling tradition.³⁵

Letters, diary entries and newspaper accounts, also utilized in oral history, fill gaps created by an individual storyteller's fading memory.³⁶ These help with diminished recall of the salient points of an event as the distance between the event and its retelling widens. Often the people who could have provided the firsthand accounts to the historical context have died, with only their available letters, memoranda, newspaper articles, or as in my case, surviving relatives remaining to shed light on the topic. No doubt many Wittenoom Italians' letters would have contained accounts of their migration experiences, but none of the people I met seemed to have kept them. During my fieldwork I came across only one letter, reproduced in Covelli et al, written by a former Wittenoom worker and his wife, both now

³⁴ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 97.

³⁵ Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, Op Cit.

³⁶ Bryman & Burgess, Op Cit. p. xx.

deceased, which gave some insight into what life was like in Wittenoom and why they remained in Australia rather than repatriating.³⁷

In the field of visual documentary sources, while photographs, films and video provide essential evidence for the researcher, there have still been debates regarding their purpose and their limitations.³⁸ In my case, the photographs participants allowed me to copy have “provided an immediate window into times past”.³⁹ They have aided in the triangulation of events described during an individual's storytelling and/or provided other information to enrich further the accounts of the Wittenoom Italians' everyday lives, as did several of the Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits.

As I proceeded it became apparent that the 600 or so Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits I had been given contained information which would prove invaluable to produce a balanced and in-depth account of events outside the control and awareness of the Italian workers. Alessandro Portelli's observations regarding the provenance of written sources and the inherent underlying connection between oral narratives and the written text reflect my own view that written sources, in the first instance, have been derived from oral contexts and later transformed into some form of written text.⁴⁰ Portelli reminds us that “what is written is first experienced or seen, and is subject to distortions even before it is set down on paper”, distortions which, he tells the reader, continue during the drafting stage.⁴¹ This type of distortion can also happen during the transcription of a recorded interview or its translation into another language.⁴² Where, for example, a researcher has made a personal judgement about relevance, sections may be intentionally discarded or some may be unintentionally left out due to lapse in concentration. This happened with my own transcriptions and translations, which I only realised when I cross-checked some of the recorded interviews with my transcribed and translated texts. These are the issues to which I have paid heed, to make sense of participants' stories.

³⁷ Covelli et al, Op Cit. p. 127.

³⁸ Bryman & Burgess, Op Cit. pp. xxii, xxiii.

³⁹ Curthoys & McGrath, Op Cit. p. 82.

⁴⁰ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 101.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 101.

⁴² Ibid. p. 97.

Making Sense of the Stories

In this thesis I employ oral and documentary sources, as well as photographs. The visual sources are used to illustrate accounts in the thesis. The documentary sources are complementary and used to address the gaps in the Italians' knowledge of the contrary roles of CSR and the department of Mines to the department of Health on occupational health and safety at Wittenoom. Ultimately my decision to make the narratives the cornerstone of this thesis was determined by my central concern to give these Italians a voice. The participants' stories address how the Italians themselves attributed meaning to the circumstances which produced them as migrants in the first place,⁴³ if their meagre financial circumstances and their goal for *sistemazione* placed them in a much more vulnerable position and more readily exploitable; and how they have interpreted the impact of Wittenoom on their lives.

The views of Ritchie and Portelli on the function of oral histories resonated with my own view formed from my life experiences. Oral historian, Donald Ritchie argues that oral history does not simplify the historical narrative but makes it more complex, hence more interesting.⁴⁴ Portelli's research found that stories "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did" and the psychological costs of their choices.⁴⁵ To convey the Wittenoom Italians' narratives, my question to myself, guided by the advice of historian Paul Thompson was: "How do I retell history, or make sense from these stories"?⁴⁶ Since one participant's life narrative was of itself insufficiently rich to reconstruct what is a highly complex series of events, I relied on a synthesis of their stories within the broader historical framework of the impact of Wittenoom on their lives. By grouping the stories around the common themes which emerged under the three broad headings of life in Italy, at Wittenoom and after Wittenoom and complemented by the Motley Rice documents and secondary sources to provide the historical context for the Italian migrants' circumstances, the narratives give a sense of the Italian diaspora which went to Wittenoom.

⁴³ O'Neill, C. (1999), 'Possibilities for Migration Anthropology', *American Ethnologist*, 26 (1), p. 225.

⁴⁴ Ritchie, Op Cit. p. 13.

⁴⁵ Portelli (1981), Op Cit. p. 100.

⁴⁶ Thompson, Op Cit. p. 203.

My influence as researcher is undeniably present in the choice of participants' stories and direct quotations. The selection of material was, however, ultimately dependent on the details contained in their accounts and the overall story I was able to construct from them. In the evaluation of the stories I took into consideration the arguments levelled against both oral and documentary sources, keeping in mind those limitations. I saw the benefits of using the personal stories, photographs and documents as the means to triangulate the data, to fill in the gaps one source provided which was lacking in another and thereby achieve academic rigour in the recording of this social history.

Both Thompson and Portelli argue and my own fieldwork confirms the importance, purpose and contribution of oral history interviews in conveying insights into a participant's everyday life, social relationships and the circumstances that impact on their lives and that traditional academic sources or written evidence do not necessarily provide.⁴⁷ As Portelli argues in his treatment of subjective memories, it is in the reading of an oral history that the readers will tease out psychological realities and symbolic meanings.⁴⁸ Historians, sociologists and researchers, in seeking to tell the story from "from below", are addressing and giving weight to the subjective dimensions of social action. This was my aim, so that I might demonstrate the individual's claims, motivations, emotions and imaginations, as shaped by their cumulative life experience.⁴⁹ This research, in providing an outlet for the Wittenoom Italians to tell their stories, has sought to reveal the complexities of these subjective life experiences.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Thompson, Op Cit. Portelli (1981), Op Cit. pp. 97, 99-100.

⁴⁸ Portelli, A. (1991), *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (State University of New York Press), pp. 68-70

⁴⁹ Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, Op Cit. p. 3.

⁵⁰ Curthoys & McGrath, Op Cit. p. 92.

Chapter Three - A Solution to Italy and Australia's Post-war Challenges: Italian Emigration

He would come home on Saturday night and Monday he would go back again. That's not a life. That's why we came to Australia: because we thought "Here we can stay together". That's the point. Instead over there [Italy]... our husbands used to go to France and they would return after six or seven months or even after a year and sometimes they didn't even return after a year. What sort of a family is that? ¹

Following World War 2, Australia and Italy implemented policies to address their post-war challenges. To stimulate economic growth, Australia's Labor government introduced an immigration policy to supply workers for its National Development Scheme, which the country's seven and a half million residents could not fill. Italy, on the other hand, encouraged its large numbers of unemployed to emigrate, forcing many families to separate. Between 1946 and 1975, seven million Italians departed; nearly 500,000 came to Australia.²

The narratives of 36 former Wittenoom miners, their wives or other family members — along with eight Italians who never emigrated — have provided accounts of life in Italy before, during and after World War 2. These accounts help explain their multiple migration decisions and why those who eventually went to Wittenoom had chosen to come to Australia. Participants' narratives contain several common themes: their *spirito della gioventù*,³ the longstanding social and economic hardships of the Italian working class and the impact of World War 2.

The accounts I collected reflect and add to the existing Italian migration history. For many centuries, Italians have chosen migration as a solution to address their political, climatic, social and economic circumstances.⁴ For many it became a way of life.⁵ Similarly to

¹ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, October 2009.

² Sassen, Op Cit. p. 69.

³ The spirit of youth. This was Miriam Panizza's response to my question: How did people survive the challenges which presented to them during their lives, leading to their decision to emigrate? Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

⁴ Cecilia, Op Cit. Templeton, Op Cit. Sassen, Op Cit. Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. Baldassar (2001), Op Cit. Gabaccia, D. R. & Ottanelli, F. M. (eds.) (2001), *Italian Workers of the World: Labour Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press).

⁵ Gabaccia, D. (1999), 'Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History', *The Journal of American History*, 86 (3), p. 1,115.

the findings of Sassen, Baldassar and Gabaccia, participants in this research made reference to several migration experiences — either their own, their family members' or their *paesani* — to achieve *sistemazione*, a notion symbolised by the aspiration to escape *la miseria*, marry and to realize home and land ownership.⁶ To attain it, Italians settled in the host country, or at the very least, spent several years abroad undertaking menial, and often the dirtiest and most inhumane jobs, before repatriating.⁷ Many accumulated savings, creating the foundations for the future.

During the 1950s and 1960s, 1,102 Italian immigrants, many with accompanying families, responded to the job opportunity at the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine in Western Australia.⁸

Italy: The Impetus to Leave

During the twentieth century, working class Italian families continued to deal with what had been generations of hardship.⁹ Examples emerged in participants' descriptions of their poverty-stricken rural backgrounds and their families' and their own previous migration experiences. Furthermore most had had limited access to education.

Italy in the late 19th century had introduced a series of educational reforms making elementary education compulsory, as well as providing adult education classes.¹⁰ In addition, by the 1920s, Mussolini increased primary education from four to five years.¹¹ At best, working class Italians born in the first two decades of the 20th century could only hope for a primary education. Educational reforms cannot have been rigorously enforced, for no matter their provenance, participants' narratives revealed that education for working class children was not a high priority. Several participants reported receiving less than the compulsory five years of primary education or knew of others who missed out altogether. Fulvia Caceffo, a retired primary teacher from the Veneto region in northern Italy, recalled that illiteracy was

⁶ See Baldassar (2001), Op Cit. Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the notion of *sistemazione*. Gabaccia & Ottanelli (eds.), Op Cit. Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. Sassen, Op Cit.

⁷ Baldassar (2001), Op Cit. Gabaccia & Ottanelli, Op Cit. Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. Sassen, Op Cit.

⁸ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit.

⁹ See, for example, Gabaccia & Ottanelli, Op Cit. Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. Sassen, Op Cit. Templeton, J. (1995), 'The Swiss connection: the origins of the Valtellina-Australia migrations', *Australian Historical Studies*, 26 (104), pp. 393-414.

¹⁰ Reeder (1998), Op Cit.

¹¹ Clark, M. (1996), *Modern Italy: 1871-1995* (London: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd), p. 277.

still widespread when she attended primary school in the 1940s.¹² From participants' accounts, secondary education became more common in the 1930s and 1940s, whether in the north or the south of the country. It did not, however, necessarily guarantee employment.

Participants' narratives spoke of humble living conditions and meagre diets, with many mouths to feed. Families could not rely on their small land holding or a day labourer's earnings to sustain them adequately; children had to work from a young age. The *mezzadri* (share croppers) endured the attached social stigma, while the landlord took half their crops as rental payment. To supplement the family income breadwinners migrated. Meanwhile families dealt with the challenges of survival and separation as they awaited their remittances. Workers moved around Italy or went to France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and Africa. Many of their parents and grandparents had already experienced migration to the Americas, Africa and Europe. Infant and adult mortalities from common societal diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis were mentioned, as was the trauma of World War 2.

Earliest memories of life in Italy for several participants were of the death of parents, siblings or grandparents. The death of the breadwinner or the wife usually prompted second marriages so that the surviving children were cared for, even if they and the non-biological parent did not bond. For young men in particular, the marriage of a widowed mother spurred their departure, once of age. Attilio Micheloni explained, "My father had died when I was a baby. Then my mother remarried...I didn't want to stay".¹³ Valentina Giannasi recalled her early life:

My life in Italy was hard because I didn't have my mother. In those times the stepmother (long pause) there were beatings. You know...I had a life...of farmers. At six years of age you were already working.¹⁴

Lina Tagliaferri was 13 days old when her father died. She and three older siblings, aged five, four and two, lived in the small village of Gromo in northern Lombardy with their mother

¹² Interview with Fulvia Caceffo, Italy, November 2008.

¹³ Interview with Attilio Micheloni, Italy, November 2008.

¹⁴ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009. As I listened to Valentina, the Italian word for stepmother — *La matrigna* — conjured up the archetypal evil stepmother image of Cinderella and other fairy tales.

who never remarried. She relied on the extended family for support. In exchange, Lina's mother "served" her brothers, while they worked in the Val D'Aosta mines.¹⁵

The children of the late Attilio Oprandi shared their father's tragic story. As a young boy Attilio had left Lombardy and gone to France with his family, where he worked as an apprentice baker. Within a few years Attilio and his younger brother and sister lost their mother, paternal grandmother and finally their father, possibly to tuberculosis. The maternal grandparents arrived from Italy. They placed Attilio's seven year old sister, Giacomina, in an orphanage in Belgium, while he and his brother were taken back to Italy (see figure 8). They would never see their sister again. She died in Belgium. By 1945 Attilio's brother, Celeste, had also died — the victim of an accident. Now, in his early twenties, Attilio was left to his own devices. He survived, but not without considerable hardship and resourcefulness.

Also in Lombardy, Emilia Pagani, whose family never emigrated, recalled the loss of two family members to pneumonia: an illness which could have been avoided had the family had access to penicillin.¹⁶ The sale of contraband was mentioned by two children of a *Guardia di Finanza*,¹⁷ stationed in northern Italy near the Swiss border. Contraband items included coffee, cigarettes and the much sought after penicillin. Once it appeared that the *Guardia di Finanza's* wife could die from an infection, he too bought penicillin from a contraband supplier.

Adults and children accepted any opportunity to earn money for the family. Lina Tagliaferri's husband, Beppe, the oldest of nine children, commenced work at a young age. As she recounted it,

Neighbours of my mother-in-law had a butcher shop. One of the five sons [of the owner] asked who wanted to...help. So Beppe after school, at the age of eight, would...help for a piece of liver, a heart, a piece of meat to make a stew. Then he got the job of butcher by the time he was 16, but they didn't want to give him a wage. So he went and became a miner... He went to work firstly pushing the wagons out from the mines, which removed the material. After you had been working for a time, one

¹⁵ The notion of '*servire*'—to cater to all the needs of males in Italian families is expressed using this verb, by both southern and northern Italian women born pre-World War 2, in particular. I recall it being used by my mother and her peers — all born in the 1920s. It was used by women in this research, whether from the north or the south of Italy.

¹⁶ Interview with Emilia Pagani, Italy, November 2008.

¹⁷ Italian Military Police who deal with infringements relating to income tax and Customs.

day a miner would say: 'Try'... He didn't go to miner's school. He learned it from others.¹⁸

Many of the Wittenoorm Italians developed a range of skills, in much the same way Beppe had. Opportunities in local villages to work for a butcher, a blacksmith, a baker, a carpenter or any other trade were quickly taken up. Attilio Oprandi worked as an apprentice baker, but also became a proficient horse handler and eventually a miner. Umberto Favero finished his *scuole medie* (junior high school) and then worked for two years on his father's farm. Given the opportunity to learn bricklaying, Umberto left the farm. Lina Nesa's brothers learned the blacksmith's trade, but were only paid a pittance.

Employment opportunities for young women, on the other hand, were limited and differed from region to region. From participants' accounts across the Italian regions, it emerged that young girls remained home. They learned to sew, helped out on the farm, and looked after younger siblings. Once old enough outside the home, their employment opportunities varied. Participants from the south and central Italy obtained paid work in local factories. In Calabria Gina Martino worked at the pasta factory in her home town of Siderno. Valentina Giannasi from Castelnuovo di Garfagnana in Tuscany was employed at the town's cheese factory. There was otherwise little prospect of employment for those who remained in the south and central Italy, apart from domestic service. In northern Italy they also worked as domestic servants, or as machinists in textile factories; the alternative was migration to Switzerland. In the industrialised north women like Caterina Bellini and Lina Tagliaferri found work in the textile mills of Ponte Nossa in Lombardy's Seriana valley or in the nearby Val D'Aosta region. Lina Nesa, who lived in Lombardy's Montagna in Valtellina, worked in the weaving mills of nearby Sondrio piano. There was also employment at the dye works in Piasco, which produced the blue overalls worn by tradesmen. The problem was the limited positions: where a woman had replaced someone who had gone to war, the position reverted to the male worker upon his return.

¹⁸ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, October 2009.

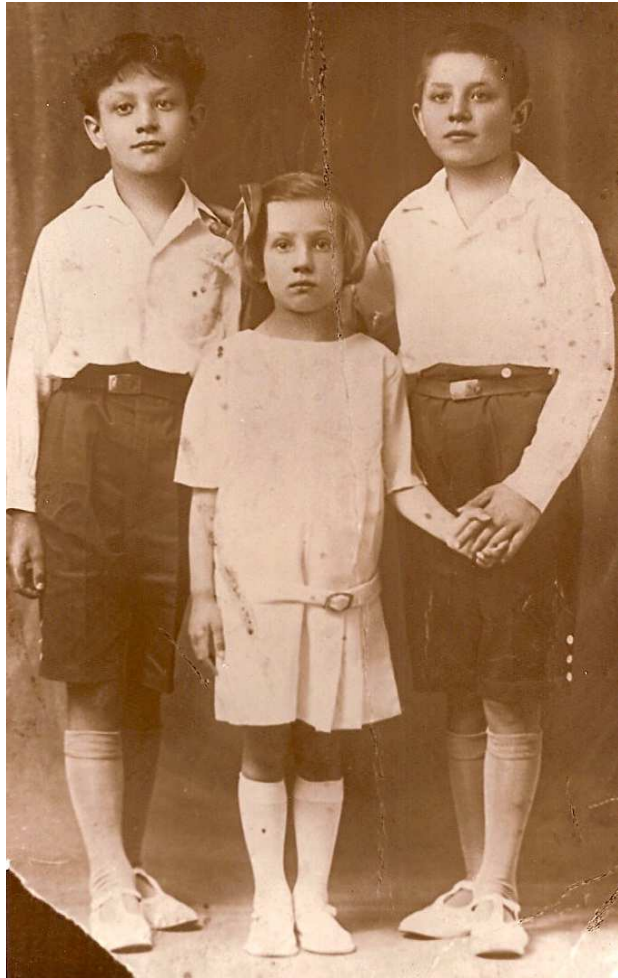


Figure 8: Celeste, Giacomina & Attilio Oprandi.
Photo courtesy Frank Oprandi.

Whatever a family's economic situation, family life meant sharing one's earnings and the limited food and beds with many siblings or extended family members. Ezio Belintende, from Sondrio in Lombardy, recalled his family's situation:

I was working in a textile factory. However, in my family there were ten of us. Ten, that's a lot. There was very little to do. Two working very hard and the others, the girls were learning to be dressmakers, so they earned nothing. Here there was never any money. When I went to work I had to take my money home to my parents. If you went dancing, you could only have one drink.¹⁹

In central and northern Italy, living in complex multi-generational households was problematic, as the accounts of several participants revealed. Familial dynamics and the increasingly thinner spread of earnings and shared space made living and working together increasingly difficult.²⁰ After marrying, several participants reported attaining independence by immigrating to Australia.

Throughout Italy farming was a way of life. Italians were either the owners of a parcel of land or worked as day or seasonal labourers or sharecroppers. These forms of farming were familiar to the Wittenoom Italians, with their scarce income derived from seasonal crops. Rural families were dependent on their harvest and the few animals they owned to feed the family, even if some could also rely on the remittances from family members who had emigrated. The *mezzadria* or share cropping system of farming, practised in many regions, had been a way of life for generations. The tenant farmer handed over a significant share of the income from his crop or a large portion of the crop itself to the absent landowner.²¹ Paolo Del Casale from the Abruzzo region and Antonio Casella from Sicily both spoke of the exploitation and the hard work associated with this system.

During Mussolini's rule (1922-1943), a farming family's existence was particularly difficult for those opposed to his fascist ideology. In the 1930s and 1940s, Lina Nesa's family lived a humble existence, typical of rural communities. Her father paid the price for openly

¹⁹ Interview with Ezio Belintende, Italy, November 2008.

²⁰ For a discussion of demography and multi-generational households see Miller, P. (2002), 'Tradition, Modernity and Italian Babies', *Social History*, 69, pp. 206-207 and Miller, P. (2004), 'Demography and gender regimes: the case of Italians and ethnic traditions', *Journal of Population Research*, 21 (2), pp. 199-222.

²¹ For a discussion of the *mezzadria* system of farming see McDonald, J. S. (1963), 'Agricultural Organization, Migration and Labour Militancy in Rural Italy', *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., (16), pp. 61-75.

defying the fascist party.²² Unlike her husband who went to Wittenoom for work or others from the Valtellina area who had been going to Australia since the 1800s, Lina's family never emigrated.²³ Her family's story of survival was a common one.

[Life] *era magra*²⁴ There was not any work; at least in my family. My father didn't want to take on the *tessera del fascio*²⁵... (Angela: what is that?) *Il Duce*²⁶... It was wartime. He [Lina's father] didn't want to [join the fascist party]... and so he never found work. If you would not accept the *tessera del fascio*, they would not give you work. And so he worked, rather we had a small vineyard — a piece of land and we survived on that. We had a cow. We kept sheep and the sheep then had their lambs which we then killed. With the wool they made socks, jumpers. I don't really remember this very well, but my sister who is older... She remembers much more. She's a few years older than me... but it was *magra, magra*.²⁷

The Nesa family took any surplus vegetables to market. With the little money earned, they bought *zoccole* or wooden clogs, because they could not afford leather shoes.

Lina's husband, Tullio Rodigari, with whom I had spoken separately, told a similar story. He recalled, "*Era triste, triste. Non c'era lavoro. Non c'era niente. A quei tempi li' una persona su cinquanta aveva un lavoro fisso.*"²⁸ Rodigari's account of the high unemployment explains why Arturo Della Maddalena, his *paesano*, was working in Switzerland during the week and returned on the weekend to toil in the family vineyard. The 18 year old Arturo Della Maddalena could hardly wait to get away from the terraced vineyards which cover the mountainous Valtellina area.

[I spent] six months in Zurich on a building site. But I used to come home on the weekend. Every weekend I come home and ah.....go in the vineyard [to work]. That's why I hate it. That's why I didn't go back to Italy any more. When I go there, I don't go in the vineyard. I just look up like that when I pass.²⁹

²² For a detailed account of life in fascist Italy see Passerini, Op Cit.

²³ For an account of the economic and geographical problems which faced the Valtellina area see Templeton, Op Cit. and Cecilia, Op Cit. for an account of Italian migration to Western Australia in the 1800s.

²⁴ Lean, in the sense that there was very little.

²⁵ Membership in the Fascist party.

²⁶ The title given to Benito Mussolini during the Fascist period.

²⁷ Interview with Lina Nesa (wife of Wittenoom electrician, Tullio Rodigari) Ponte in Valtellina, November 2008.

²⁸ It was hard, hard. There were no jobs. There was nothing. At that time, one person in fifty had permanent work.

²⁹ Interview with Arturo Della Maddalena, Perth, December 2008.

Prior to meeting with Arturo in Perth, during my visit to the Valtellina in 2008, as I viewed the steeply terraced vineyards from the train, I had tried to imagine how hard the work must have been (see figure 9).

Rosa Tamburri (nee D'Uva) was born further south, in the Molise region in the village of Castel Petruso just before World War 2. Unlike the *mezzadri*, Rosa's family owned their farm (see figure 10). Yet her story is also one of poverty and of the impact of the war, a subject touched upon by several participants.

Rosa remembered that

Through the war we had very bad memories. I wish that sometimes I could forget.....but I think those things you can't forget. We were begging for bread.....for food... Mum had a little garden there. We used to go and pick tomatoes when they were there. We had to work. We had goats, sheep that kept us going too with milk. We never used to buy anything. We used to live from the farm that we had... We had to move away from home... I remember they put us in a big wooden thing on the side of the donkey... They took us away to a cave because the Germans they were shooting... We were there in the cave... We bought wheat and a bit of meat because we had lambs dad used to kill and we survived about six weeks.....Every day was like that... My dad... heard a lot of people got killed there. My dad went to help pick up the pieces... When dad used to tell us the stories they were very upsetting... While we were there at these caves, these four German soldiers... found us... and they point the gun at my dad. We all start screaming... They took him... because they were lost. My father had to show them the main road where all the army was going — just before the English people and the Americans came to Italy... After about four hours dad came back. He said "I think they had children too... They had a bit of a heart. They didn't want to shoot me".³⁰

Shopkeepers too felt the impact of the seasonal and limited income from farming. In the 1950s Giacomo Bevacqua, despite having completed the *Artigiano* stream of secondary schooling, was unemployed. He recalled the financial stress with which his parents had to contend. The family owned a shop in the town of Tortorici in the province of Capo D'Orlando Sicily. Just like the Nesa family in the north, the farmers in Tortorici, relied on the sale of their crops to pay for goods bought on credit in the Bevacqua's shop. This system of payment had the Bevacqua family waiting months to be paid, making life very difficult for the family even if

³⁰ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

there was food on the table. Giacomo, like his brother and sister who stayed in Sicily, remained unemployed until his decision to immigrate to Australia.

The Circuitous Path to Australia

Such difficult circumstances set working class Italians throughout the first half of the 20th century on multiple migration paths for work.³¹

The most pressing reason to leave Italy was found in the aftermath of World War 2. The Fascist regime's choice to side with Germany and Japan had made Italy a combat zone, with the country experiencing Allied bombings. Over three million homes, railway stock, trucks, bridges and ports were destroyed or badly damaged.³² Once Mussolini was deposed in 1943, Nazi atrocities followed.³³ In spite of the devastation, Italy's economy revived quickly only to be stalled by the government initiated credit squeeze to slow down the country's rampant inflation.³⁴ Economic growth, albeit uneven, would only be sustained in the 1960s.³⁵ A long history as a labour-sending rather than a labour-importing area would exclude Italy from the benefit of high growth that the influx of workers stimulated elsewhere.³⁶ Prime Minister De Gasperi saw emigration as the solution to the country's high unemployment.

Until 1965, despite Italian diplomacy and Papal pronouncements, the U.S. (the recipient of many Italian migrants in the early 1900s) retained its immigration quotas introduced in the 1920s, limiting Italians' entry.³⁷ Italy consequently pursued other migration avenues. In 1947 the government signed bi-lateral agreements with Switzerland and Argentina — two of Italy's traditional migrant destinations.³⁸

³¹ See, for example, Gabaccia & Ottanelli, Op Cit. Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. Sassen, Op Cit. Cecilia, Op Cit.

³² Clark, Op Cit, p. 317.

³³ Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 613.

³⁴ Clark, Op Cit. p. 348.

³⁵ Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 613.

³⁶ Sassen, Op Cit. p. 140.

³⁷ Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 613.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 613.



Figure 9: Terraced vineyards in the Valtellina 2008.



Figure 10: Rosa Tamburri's family. Rosa is on her mother's right. Photo courtesy Rosa Tamburri.

Several participants' accounts suggest the Swiss agreement proved unsatisfactory as they were offered only seasonal or temporary work. In a population of 48 million people, official Italian statistics by August 1951 had recorded approximately 1.7 million Italians without work; with the hidden unemployed among rural labourers estimated at 3 to 4 million. With returning soldiers swelling the numbers wanting jobs, it was impossible to reduce the high unemployment.³⁹ Just as had happened in response to previous economic crises, the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi encouraged Italians to go abroad: "*Imparate le lingue e emigrate*".⁴⁰ Richard Casey, the Australian Foreign Minister, in private meetings with De Gasperi in November 1951 touched on another reason. Emigration would reduce the temptation for people to drift into Communism in desperation; an ideology the recently elected Menzies government and Pope Pius XII alike also saw as a menace.⁴¹ By 1951 the Italian government had signed a bi-lateral agreement with Australia.⁴²

Disheartened and anxious to find work, couples and single men and women across Italy emigrated. In many instances migration occurred within Italy or into neighbouring European countries, as had been the case before the war. Many young children found work in their village, or as was common in the northern alpine areas of Lombardy and the Trentino Alto Adige, they walked over the mountains into Switzerland where jobs as shepherds were available in spring and summer. Prompted by my question as to why his father had gone to Wittenoom in 1951, Severino Scandella told me about his late father Evaristo's early migration experiences from his village of Fino del Monte in Lombardy. His father's decision had its beginnings in his childhood work experiences, long before ever having heard of Wittenoom.

He went [to Wittenoom]... the reason being that he wanted to earn more money than he was earning by being in Switzerland or in France, as happened to the majority of our fellow townspeople... Our young people of that time... would leave at the age of 8, 9,10. They would

³⁹ National Archives of Australia, Brisbane: A report on Immigration and related matters – 1952. Book 1, series BP311/4. The Australia-Italy Assisted Passage Migration Agreement: 29 March 1951, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Learn a language and emigrate! Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 613.

⁴¹ Millar, T.B. (ed.), (1972), *Australian Foreign Minister: The Diaries of R.G. Casey 1951-1960* (London: Collins), pp. 15-16 & 52.

⁴² Australia and Italy (1951), 'No.1741, Agreement between the Government of Italy and the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for Assisted Migration', United Nations -Treaty Series 1952.

go to Switzerland on foot... Going through the mountains, through the *Bresolana*, and the other passes to get to St Moritz... There they used to work as shepherds and herdsmen... He [Evaristo] stayed in Switzerland until he was... 19 or 20 years of age... He was born in 1915, and the war had started.

Evaristo Scandella, like many Italian emigrants, learned new skills and earned the admiration of his employers for his work ethic.

From 1935 to 1940 before the war, then, while they were there, in time, they would find other jobs.....such as carpenters, labourers, bricklayers. And because they all had the same history of being good workers, people who wanted to work, they changed their jobs often and willingly; usually from one season to another. Every company, every business, which employed them, would always pay them a little bit more, so that they would return to work with them. Therefore when they were there, all our emigrants would go from business to business, from company to company, in order to earn more.⁴³

The lack of permanent employment had persisted in Switzerland. In 1951 Evaristo Scandella, now with a wife and two young daughters and without secure employment, had no option but to accept the offer of work from the Wittenoom mine manager, Paul Reagan, when he arrived in Evaristo's home town. Reagan seemed to know they were experienced miners. This perhaps was not unusual, as in nearby Gorno there were mines owned by an English company — possibly belonging to the British asbestos company Turner & Newall. Their senior executive, Walter Shepherd, visited Wittenoom in 1951.⁴⁴

In the villages of southern and central Italy while parents worked girls like Rosa Tamburri tended to help out on the family farm, provide child care for the younger members of the family, or were employed as domestic servants by the wealthy. To supplement her family's limited income before and after the war Rosa Tamburri's father, like many men, travelled widely to find work.

I remember running after my dad all the time... He used to go out to work a lot. I used to cry. I want go with him. He used to go anywhere. Rome. He used to go to countries where there was... work there — three, four, weeks, five weeks... I remember my mum struggling with us. We were five of us. My brother was born — the youngest one in 1945. There was a lot of suffering there.

⁴³ Interview with Severino Scandella, Italy, November 2008.

⁴⁴ Shepherd, W. W. F. Report on Visit to Australia 28 April 1951 to 6 June 1951; Turner & Newall Papers 104/1080-1101, Manchester Metropolitan University. For the history of the Turner & Newall Company in England see Tweedale, Op Cit.

We had to dig deep; working in the orchard. I had three years school. That's all I had there. I had to go home and look after youngest ones and mum had to... do the work [on the farm].⁴⁵

In northern Italy women who did not find employment in their villages as domestics for the wealthy migrated. They moved to the larger Italian cities to work for the wealthy as servants or went to Switzerland as cleaners in hospital and hotel laundries. In the 1940s, with the help of her older sister, Lina Tagliaferri found work as a domestic with a Milanese lawyer's family. During the World War 2 bombings of Milan, Lina did not go to the air raid shelter. She chose instead to carry on with her domestic tasks. Her employer would have expected their completion upon her return from the shelter, working into the night if necessary, while the family slept. She remained with the Milanese family until 1948, when she went to Samaden, near St Moritz in Switzerland. Lina worked as a cleaner in the town's hospital, earning considerably more than she had with the Milanese family. By 1949 she had married. She and her husband, Beppe, remained in Samaden until his job ended. They then returned to her husband's home town of Rovetta, in northern Italy. He subsequently found work laying sewers in Cormano just outside of Milan. He came home on weekends, and only met his new-born baby daughter some days after her birth. Anxious to reunite their family, within two years Lina, her husband, Beppe, and their young daughter went to Australia. Like Evaristo Scandella, Beppe was among a group of Lombard miners who had been recruited to work at Wittenoom by the mine's manager in 1951 (see figure 13).

It was common for families to be separated as men moved away from their villages in search of work. Nevertheless most found only temporary work in European factories, the mines of northern Italy, France or Belgium, on the Alpine dam projects and the underground passes built to link Italy with France, Switzerland and Austria, or in construction in Switzerland (see figure 11).

Many of those who went to Belgium worked in the coalmines. Prior to their marriage, Lina Tagliaferri's husband, Beppe, had worked there too. To escape the shocking conditions, his mother invented a plausible reason for his early return. Rosa Tamburri's story of her father's work experience in the Belgium mines sheds light on Beppe's likely reason for

⁴⁵ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

wanting to leave so quickly. It also explains *il signor* D'Uva's (Rosa's father) preference for Australia, despite the improvement in his family's economic situation after the war. Ironically, all but one of his five children would work in Wittenoom.

Rosa recalled:

[In] 1946, he went to Belgium. He stayed there till 1950 and in 1951 he came to Australia. He used to come [home] every six months. He used to bring us chocolate and clothes. Also he earned the good money there. So we really after that we weren't suffering with food and everything else... I was only... 10, 12. So my dad he said, "If I cannot go to Australia, I have to take my family to Belgium", because we were allowed to go there. But because he had sons, before they have a job outside in Belgium, they had to do two years underground. He didn't wish that because it was very bad. He said he was buried two or three times. He was lucky to be alive. They found him. He said that was very bad work underground. So that's why he decided to come to Australia. He paid two hundred and thirty pound [\$460] [for each member of the family] to come to Australia. In Italy... there was no future for young ones.⁴⁶

The seven D'Uva family members' journey to come to Australia was expensive, hence their arrival in stages. Rosa's father and brother arrived in Australia first, working for three years to pay for the other family members' passage to Australia. It begs the question: Why did they not take up the Assisted Passage Scheme signed in 1951 between Australia and Italy which guaranteed migrants work for two years and financial support for the voyage? According to an Australian government report on immigration published in 2001, of the nearly 500,000 Italians who came to Australia looking for work only 42,000 took up the offer of an assisted passage.⁴⁷ It is difficult to understand why unemployed Italians desperate to find a job would opt to pay £230 per person, instead of taking advantage of the Assisted Passage Scheme. Bosworth sheds some light on the selection process:

[Italian]Migrants were to be given scrupulous health checks (preferably by Australian doctors), and all political extremists were to be 'weeded out'... in November 1951, the Australian foreign minister, R. G. Casey... was upbraided by... the Italian under-secretary of State for foreign affairs, who claimed that, of 8191 applicants for assisted migration, only 62 had survived Australian screening procedures and 47 were on the high seas.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

⁴⁷ Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (2001); 'Immigration: Federation to Century's End 1901-2000', Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Statistics Section, (Belconnen: Commonwealth of Australia), p. 36.

⁴⁸ Bosworth, *Op Cit.* p. 614.

In comparison, between 1946 and 1971, one million Anglo migrants arrived on free or assisted passage, as British ex-servicemen, selected civilians and their dependents.⁴⁹

Several participants' stories refer to their time in France. Some had gone there in the 1920s as children accompanying their parents. I noted earlier in this chapter that Attilio Oprandi went to France as a child with his parents and two siblings. Had it not been for the deaths of his parents and grandparent in a relatively short period of time, he may never have returned to Italy or come to Australia. By 1951 his circumstances had changed yet again. He was now married, with a child about to be born when Wittenoom's manager, Paul Reagan, arrived with an offer of work. Attilio, with his new responsibilities and in search of secure and well-paid work, accepted. He left his wife, Caterina, and one day old son, Francesco, in the village. His work experiences in Italy in the mines close to his home in the Seriana valley and in the construction of one of the Alpine underground passes proved ideal as a miner at Wittenoom (see figure 12).

Giulio Santini, Umberto Favero and Bruno Giannasi also worked France. Their desire for permanent work, more money, adventure, or simply the arrival of the Australian government's approval of their immigration application prompted their decision to go to Australia. In the late 1950s, leaving his young family in Tuscany, Bruno Giannasi had gone to Moselle on the Franco-German border where he had found low paying factory work. He remained there until 1960, when an Australian government letter informed him of his successful immigration application. Umberto Favero, home from France to spend Christmas with family in his town of Tarzo in the Veneto region, read about work in Australia. He applied and was accepted. Umberto's story is typical of many young men of the 1950s and 60s.

In Italy, you were always looking for work. You went round to the different companies. There were those who would say: 'I'll give you work for two weeks, three weeks and then it finished. On the farms yes [it was permanent] but the farms didn't pay you much money. And they had a request for workers [in France] for bricklayers. So I put in an application and in three or four weeks, they asked me if I wanted to go to Paris — in 1957. I did three and a half years in France. Then I returned to Italy for holidays at Christmas. And I saw at the municipal offices there

⁴⁹ Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (2001), 'Immigration: Federation to Century's End 1901-2000'; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Statistics Section (Belconnen: Commonwealth of Australia), p. 33.

were offers to go to Australia. I said, "I'll put my name down. If I'm accepted before I go back to France, I'll go to Australia; otherwise I'll go back to France".⁵⁰

Giulio Santini could find only temporary work in France. His desire to go to Canada — sparked by his father's stories of his time there during the 1920s, rather than the ten years he had spent in Australia in the 1930s — waned with his older brother's immigration to Australia.

I left school at about 16. I had *la scuola media*, like high school here in Australia. I could get a good job when I finished school but I preferred to go round Europe for a while. I was in Alainscours, in the Sommes, north of France and I was in Lyons for another three months and then I was in Paris for a while. And I work on one of those chrome factories. I [had] been up there from 1956 to 1959... It wasn't continuous work. [It] was six months, then three months home and six months... Up and down... I decided to come in Australia. My father... wanted to come back in Australia in 1949... my brother said: "No, I will go in Australia"... I [came to] see my brother which that was in 1959. Ten years after my brother came out. And I met my wife and that's it!!⁵¹

The theme of absent husbands and fathers was common in participants' stories. A husband's decision to migrate separated many families; one wife went so far as to describe herself as a widow. Once existing funds were exhausted, wives had to rely on their extended family and their own devices. Lina Tagliaferri described her life after her husband's departure for Wittenoom:

When my husband came to Australia, I was left there with ten thousand *lire*. Five thousand I spent on firewood. It was December...and then my daughter got tonsillitis. [With] the doctor[']s bills] that money finished quickly. *Ho dovuto arrangiarmi*.⁵² to wash for that family there. When I'd go to the baker's, to the butcher's where I'd buy the essentials — the baker said to me, "I'll put it on account and when your husband sends you the money, you can pay". I said, "No, I don't want that!" Because when you have it on account, you write it down in haste, but when you finally add it up, you have to pay!... It was my mother-in-law who told me: "[stored] in our roof there is as much [food] as you want"... I used to buy things, yes. She gave me rabbits because the doctor had said to make her baby food [daughter, Maria] with rabbit's broth. She was weak in the legs and the veal's leg I bought to make broth, but I left the steak at the butcher's. I ate potato and *fagioli* [beans].⁵³

⁵⁰ Interview with Umberto Favero, via phone to Perth, February 2009.

⁵¹ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

⁵² I had to find ways to get by.

⁵³ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

While separation may have provided relief for some from a harsh, disciplining father, this was not the case for brother and sister, Alvaro and Lidia Giannasi. They mourned their father's absence. Bruno Giannasi was away in France for work. The distance and associated high cost of travel to their Tuscan village of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana meant they saw their father infrequently. Bruno Giannasi struggled to earn enough money to send back to his family. The desire to be reunited led Italian families to come to Australia, where husbands finally found permanent employment in places such as Wittenoom. Valentina Giannasi's story no doubt exemplifies many "widowed" immigrant women who eventually rejoined their husbands.⁵⁴ Valentina Giannasi and her two children, nine year old Alvaro and five year old Lidia, had to wait three years to be reunited with Bruno. Not long after his arrival in Perth in 1960, friends had told him about Wittenoom where he found work immediately. Valentina explained:

I decided because I had Alvaro who was very sickly. The doctor was advising me not to take him to Australia. He [the doctor] was afraid...He [Alvaro] was very sick. My husband said, "Come, but if you see that it isn't good for Alvaro, I'll send you straight back". But I wanted to come because... I wrote to my *paesani*. I said, "I want to come to Australia! Here I have been a widow for many years. I have to decide: or the life of a widow or my children need a father"... Lidia especially wanted [to come to Australia]. Alvaro... didn't want to come to Australia. "Mum, let's not go to Australia."... But...I wrote to him [Bruno]..."Wherever you take me, you take me. Even if it's in a stable I want to come to be with you. I want my family to be united".⁵⁵

⁵⁴ For a discussion see Reeder, L. (2003), *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, Sicily 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

⁵⁵ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 11: Pio Panizza worked on the Bissinia Dam Project in the Italian Alps in the 1950s seen here in the background. Photo courtesy Pio Panizza.



Figure 12: Attilio Oprandi at the Alpine tunnel construction site of the Galleria Col di Tenda, Piedmont, linking Italy and France. Photo courtesy Frank Oprandi.



Figure 13: The recruited Lombard miners from the Seriana Valley on board ship bound for Australia, February 1951. Photo courtesy Frank Oprandi.

Australia: The Impetus to Receive

After World War 2, as the Italian government dealt with the country's high unemployment, the Australian Government faced its own economic, as well as defence issues which had emerged closer to home. Australia's leaders were convinced that the country could no longer rely on Britain for its security because of the Japanese victories in the Pacific in 1941-42. A larger population, particularly in the north of the country, and a strong economy with a modern manufacturing sector supported by primary industries were essential to address these matters.⁵⁶

Australia adopted a National Development Scheme to stimulate the country's post-war economy.⁵⁷ One of the projects under the scheme was the asbestos industry at Wittenoom Gorge in the north west of Western Australia, which at the same time would create a presence in the underpopulated north. To implement their policy the government introduced an immigration policy to increase the size of the country's work force, which the existing population of 7.5 million could not fill.⁵⁸ To mitigate working-class Australians' existing fear and racist attitudes towards immigrants, the first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, invoked his now familiar slogan: "Populate or perish". He warned the Australian public that "we must fill the country or lose it".⁵⁹

Historically in Australia non-British migrants were *personae non gratae*. This racist attitude was consolidated in the Immigration Act of 1901, more commonly known as the "White Australia" policy. The Act had been introduced in response to the fear and mistrust of indentured migrant labour, South Pacific Kanakas and Chinese, recruited to work in the nascent Queensland sugar industry and the gold rushes during the mid 1850s.⁶⁰ By the first decade of the 1900s this fear and mistrust had extended to Italian people. In the early 1900s

⁵⁶ Castles, S. (1994), 'Italians in Australia: the Impact of Recent Migration on the Culture and Society of a Postcolonial Nation', in Tomasi, L. F. (ed.), *The Columbus People* (New York: Center for Migration Studies), p. 345.

⁵⁷ National Archives of Australia, Melbourne: Series number: MP 598/1, Control symbol: 2 Barcode: 942491: Minutes of the first meeting of the Commonwealth Immigration Planning Committee, 18 November, 1949, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Castles, Op Cit. p. 349.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 345.

⁶⁰ Commonwealth of Australia (1994), *Australian Social Trends. Population Growth: Birthplaces of Australia's settlers*; Australian Bureau of Statistics

Italians had replaced the Kanaka workers in the Queensland sugar industry and had joined the rush to the Western Australian goldfields.⁶¹ Italians were categorized as coming somewhere between the Chinese and the blacks and therefore “not quite white”.⁶² According to the Italian historian, Cecilia, Italians came in increasing numbers to escape the approaching threat of the First World War. At this time within union and Labor parliamentarians’ ranks, accusations of Italians being employed under contract, taking jobs from Australians and working for lesser wages in contravention of the 1901 Immigration Act fuelled racist attitudes in Australian society. The findings of the Western Australian Royal Commission of 1904 quashed these accusations. Statements from various employers and unionists decrying these accusations, however, failed to defuse the racist attitudes towards Italians.⁶³ In 1919 and again in 1934, riots directed against the Italians flared in the Kalgoorlie gold fields of Western Australia.⁶⁴ The declaration of World War 2 in which Italy had aligned with Germany did nothing to quell the suspicion and mistrust of Italians. 4,727 Italians, many now Australian citizens, were declared ‘enemy aliens’ and interned.⁶⁵

At the end of the war the announcement of the National Development Scheme, designed to fill vacancies in jobs Australians refused, continued to stir up racist attitudes. Given the categorization of Italians as “not quite white”, there was resistance to the recruitment of southern Europeans considered coarse and ignorant. The Australian government, accordingly, defined “desirable types” as the British, followed by the Northern Europeans, Eastern Europeans and finally southern Europeans, to whom they applied limited entry quotas.⁶⁶ In line with the 1901 Immigration Act, non-Europeans were excluded altogether. To encourage migration to Australia, in 1949 Calwell visited Oslo, Copenhagen

⁶¹ Cecilia, Op Cit. pp. 232-250, 279-290.

⁶² Cecilia, Op Cit. p. 225. Greenwood, G. (ed.) (1955), *Australia: A Social and Political History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson), p. 247.

⁶³ Cecilia, Op Cit. pp. 221-225.

⁶⁴ Bunbury, B. (1997), *Timber for Gold: Life on the Goldfields Woodlines* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press), pp. 35-40. Cecilia, Op Cit. pp. 228-29.

⁶⁵ Castles, Op Cit. p. 344. Interview with Sara Merizzi and Rina Tomei, Perth, December 2010. Their father was interned on Rottnest Island for the duration of the war.

⁶⁶ Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 613.

and Paris, but not Rome. Despite the exclusion of Italians in the Labor government's initial plans, Italian migrants continued to arrive independently, albeit in small numbers.⁶⁷

As it became evident that Calwell's policy to target Scandinavian immigrants was failing to attract sufficient workers, in 1950 the Chairman of the Australian government's Immigration Planning Council visited Italy. The northern Italians resembled the fair Scandinavians, and he had gone to Italy in order to encourage them to come to Australia. The importance of attracting workers to fill jobs in less desirable industries had forced the Australian government to actively recruit Italians as one of its main sources of immigrants, second only to the British.⁶⁸ In March 1951 the government, wary of the Australian public's suspicion of Italians, made the announcement of its bi-lateral accord with Italy concurrently with the Netherlands accord.⁶⁹ Italy and the Netherlands were the two countries Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, the operator of the Wittenoom mine, had approached to recruit workers for their blue asbestos mine.⁷⁰ The Italians who went to Wittenoom arrived in three discernible waves: in 1950 as displaced persons of World War 2, followed in 1951 by ABA Limited's recruits and subsequently the majority who heard about Wittenoom by word of mouth; many of these were already in Western Australia.

Provenance of the Wittenoom Italians

Approximately 230,000 Italians came to Australia between 1947 and 1966.⁷¹ Of those 1,102 went to work at Wittenoom. They came from 18 of Italy's 20 regions, excluding the Val D'Aosta and Umbria.⁷² Among them was one family from Italy's informal colony, Egypt.⁷³ The 36 Italians interviewed in this research reflect the larger representation from the

⁶⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1301.0 – Year Book Australia (2005), *Australia's top four overseas birthplace groups*. Retrieved 26 March 2010 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/ABS@.NSF/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%2>

⁶⁸ Castles, Op Cit. p. 345.

⁶⁹ Bosworth, Op Cit. p. 614

⁷⁰ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Commonwealth Immigration file, Western Australia, file no. W50/H/7038.

⁷¹ Castles et al., Op Cit. p. 243.

⁷² Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit. p. 257.

⁷³ At the July 2011 Biennial conference of the Australasian Centre of Italian Studies: *New Directions*, I attended a keynote address on Italian colonization by Associate Professor Mia Fuller of the University of California, Berkley. To my question regarding Egypt's role in Italy's colonization policy, she explained that Egypt was not part of Italy's formal colonization pursuits which included Tripoli (now Libya) and Ethiopia (now Eritrea). Egypt was under the control of the British, and was part of an informal colonization encouraged by the Italian government, during the early part of the 20th century.

Lombardy region, consistent with the figures reported by Merler, Ercolanelli and de Klerk.⁷⁴ Eleven of the interviewees originated from the region of Lombardy, one from Friuli Venezia Giulia, two from the Veneto, two from the Trentino Alto Adige, five from Tuscany (two from the Island of Elba), two from Abruzzo, two from Molise, six from Calabria, three from Sicily and two from Egypt.

Maria Detoni (nee Caffieri), an eight year old when she arrived in Wittenoom with her family in May 1951 from the Island of Elba, reported that the first Italians to go to Wittenoom in 1950 were the Displaced Persons relocated under the International Refugee Organization program. Among them were her late husband's family.⁷⁵ Three displaced families were mentioned during my fieldwork: the Detoni, Sterpini and Gere families.⁷⁶ Migrant selection documents show these displaced families had arrived in Fremantle on the 11th June 1950. They had been selected on the basis of their age, physical fitness and their ability to do manual work. From Fremantle they were transferred by train to Northam Immigration and Reception and Training Centre where they spent three to four weeks undergoing an introductory English course and familiarization with Australia before being sent to Wittenoom, where they were contracted to stay for two years.⁷⁷ The three families mentioned above stayed considerably longer.⁷⁸

The narratives of surviving family members and migration documents confirm that by the 16 February 1951 the first recruits, experienced miners from the villages of Clusone, Rovetta and Fino del Monte in the Seriana Valley of Lombardy had arrived (see figure 13 earlier).⁷⁹ On the 11 April nine men from the village of Vermiglio in the Trentino Alto Adige

⁷⁴ Merler, Ercolanelli, & de Klerk, *Op Cit.* p. 257.

⁷⁵ Interview with Maria Detoni, Perth, December 2010.

⁷⁶ Interviews with Maria Detoni, Perth, December 2010; Maria Scali, Perth, September 2009; Lina Tagliaferri, November, Perth 2010.

⁷⁷ National Archives of Australia, Name search: Migrant Selection Documents for displaced persons who travelled to Australia per Oxfordshire departing Naples, 15 May, 1950. Series A12030, Control symbol 615-617, Barcode 4763662. See series notes pp. 1-9.

⁷⁸ Interviews with Maria Detoni, Perth, December, 2010; Maria Scali, Perth, September 2009; Lina Tagliaferri, November, Perth 2010.

⁷⁹ Interviews with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009; Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008. National Archives of Australia, Perth: Series no. PP6/1. Control symbol 1950/H/6460, Barcode 4312970. Paul Hallam Reagan [Application for admission of Evaristo Scandella, Attilio Oprandi, Bartolo Ferrari, Donato Ferrari, Giovanni Visinoni, Luigi Ranza, Samuele Brasi, Giuseppe Bonomi, Angelo Poloni, Angelo Alberti and William Hermans to Australia]. Arrived Fremantle per Napoli, 16 February 1951. Series no. K1331. Control Symbol 1957/Oprandi A. Barcode 3261509.

region with no mining experience had also arrived, desperate for work.⁸⁰ By May the Caffieri, Galletti and Tamagni families (recently unemployed Island of Elba coalminers) had joined them.⁸¹

Meanwhile British workers and ticketed Australian miners had been leaving at the end of their six month contract, refusing to tolerate the working conditions.⁸² Because of their inability to retain workers, CSR kept in regular contact with the Department of Immigration to monitor the arrival of their Italian and Dutch recruits.⁸³ CSR's objective to establish a reliable labour force would mainly be met by immigrant Italians. Their desperate need for work made them ideal employees, and they tolerated the working conditions. Many Italians already in Western Australian, who were dissatisfied with the lack of steady employment opportunities and low paying jobs, upon hearing about the earning potential in Wittenoom also applied to work there. They would experience conditions even more confronting than those on their arrival in Perth.

Arrival in Western Australia: First Impressions

During the 1950s and 1960s, prior to going to Wittenoom many Italians had settled in Perth or in Western Australian country areas.⁸⁴ Participants speaking about their first impressions of Western Australia contrasted the Italy they had left behind with the Port of Fremantle (the stepping off point for migrants settling in Western Australia) Perth and the Western Australian countryside.

After a month at sea, the first still vivid memory for some was the sheds where the customs and immigration formalities were conducted. Giacomo Bevacqua recounted laconically:

Oh, boy! (laughing) I said. We land in Fremantle Port. It was really big sheds there. That's all. Like wool sheds. The port in Italy was ten times better than this one!⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Hills, Op Cit. p. 36.

⁸¹ Interview with Maria Detoni and Nadia De Laurentis, Perth, December 2010.

⁸² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10593: District Inspector A.E. Lloyd's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer. 13 October 1950. Williams, Op Cit.

⁸³ National Archives of Australia, Perth: File of Department of Immigration, Western Australia. Date of opening 19 January 1951. Subject: Russell P. Luke. Applications for Landing Permits.

⁸⁴ Cecilia, Op Cit. pp. 217-29.

⁸⁵ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

Rosa Tamburri was a teenager when she arrived with her brother in September 1954. Her curiosity was aroused at the sight of the sheds, as she stood on the deck of the ship,

Oceania:

Well, the first impression I got I was still on the ship and I was wondering what all those shed were for. You know the shed, the boat shed there?

I knew exactly what and where Giacomo and Rosa meant as they described the sight. I had visited Fremantle port a few days earlier and had photographed the building (see figure 14).

Rosa continued:

And then when I got off I said to dad, "What's all this? Are they for chooks or animals?" He said (she is laughing) "No, that's for us. See... you come here [to] the port"... I thought... it's unusual because our house [in Italy] was a stone house (see figure 15).⁸⁶

For others it was the city of Perth and the climate which struck them. In 1963, at the age of 19, Vincenzo Ubaldi had arrived in Perth, to join his older brother. Unlike other Italian immigrants who took time to adapt he settled in immediately. He explained:

I liked the way of life in Perth. I have never wanted to leave Perth, not even to the Eastern States: Melbourne, Sydney. I met lots of people who were coming from there. "Vincenzo", they'd say, "let's go to Sydney, Melbourne"! "No! I like living here! I don't want to go to Melbourne and Sydney".⁸⁷

As he switched between Italian and English, Vincenzo found it difficult to put into words the attraction he felt and still feels for the city of Perth and Western Australia:

A city, a climate that *mi sento molto comodo*.⁸⁸ It's not that I can talk about the other states because I've never wanted to go. (laughs) Don't ask me why because I don't know! It's difficult to explain. Yes. *Mi sento bene qui*.⁸⁹

Many upon arrival, like Paolo Del Casale, were unable to tolerate the heat, having left behind the cold Italian winter.

When I arrived 19 January [1956], there was a heat here that you could not stand. We had left the cold. We arrived here and found the heat. We were sleeping on the grass outside (laughs) in Lake Street, Perth. There was no air conditioning [in those days]. No fan. There was nothing. You couldn't stay inside. We were sleeping on the grass

⁸⁶ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

⁸⁷ Interview with Vincenzo Ubaldi, Perth, December 2008.

⁸⁸ I feel so comfortable.

⁸⁹ I feel good here.

until it cooled down in the morning and then we went to bed. What a heat!!!! *Madonna!!!*⁹⁰

Miriam Panizza and Caterina Bellini never went to Wittenoom. Their husbands had already moved on from there by the time of their arrival in Western Australia. Their stories are typical of why many migrant women came to Australia. In the early sixties, Pio Panizza had begun correspondence with Miriam, a childhood friend from his hometown of Vermiglio, in the Trentino Alto Adige. By 1964, Miriam had accepted Pio's proposal to come to Australia and marry. In January 1965, Miriam Panizza disembarked at night, in Fremantle. The next day her future husband took her to Wundowie, where he worked as a timber cutter. Miriam described what she found:

Leaving Perth, and going to Wundowie. This road — it's like you would never get there because it was all in the bush. The earth was red. We're not used to seeing that soil. The plants had an effect on me because they were burnt, halfway up. I had the car window closed. But this arm — it was one big wound. I had got sunburnt; so much so that I had to go and find the chemist shop. What can I say? I was there. It wasn't that I could go back to Italy straight away. To get to the town from Perth, we didn't even see one house. Inside, you don't know what to say. Then I saw the house which oh my God! It was one of these little houses of asbestos, prefabricated. I entered. You could see that the previous owners were very dirty. We Italians are not dirty like that. There was nothing in the house — a house which had been let go. We went back to this aunty's place in Perth. We were going to get married. In Perth, in the meantime, he was taking me around the city. [It was] beautiful. It was all a bit of a novelty for me. It didn't compare to our cities. However, the language — I didn't understand anything. And there was always written: 'for sale' (she pronounces *sale* phonetically, using the Italian pronunciation). 'What do they do with all this salt?', I asked? "No", they said, "This means it's for sale!"⁹¹

After their marriage, in St Brigid's, West Perth, they went to live in Wundowie where Pio had returned to work as a timber cutter (see figures 16-18).

By the time Caterina Bellini, joined her husband, Attilio Oprandi in 1955, he had already left Wittenoom. He had been appalled by the working conditions, just like the ticketed Australian miners who had gone there in the late 1940s. He was in another god forsaken place — the goldmines of Coolgardie, but not before having spent many months on the Woodlines outside Kalgoorlie cutting timber. His one day old son Francesco whom he had

⁹⁰ Interview with Paolo Del Casale, Perth, December 2008.

⁹¹ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

farewelled on the 18th of January 1951 was now four years old. The little boy had no idea who his father was when he got off the ship in Fremantle, except for the stories his mother would have told him during those four years of separation. Caterina Bellini was shocked by Coolgardie, on the edge of the Western Desert. It bore no resemblance to the lushness and greenery she had left behind in the Seriana valley of the Lombardy region. With no English and deprived of the support of family and friends, she, and other women like her, had to learn to adapt if they were to survive and achieve *sistemazione*.

Conclusion

As the twentieth century advanced, working class Italians continued to experience economic and social hardships similar to those of their parents and generations of Italians before them. Italy's uncertain economic future after World War 2 merely added to their woes. To create a better future for themselves and their families they had no other choice but to seek the path of emigration as other Italians before them had. For those who had sought jobs closer to home in Switzerland, France and Belgium, their temporary or hazardous nature prompted Italians to immigrate to Argentina, Africa, Canada, the USA, once they relaxed migration quotas, and in much lesser numbers to Australia.

Working class Italians' long history of hardship made them ideal employees for the Wittenoom mine. The well-paid and ongoing work attracted many Italians prepared to tolerate the conditions many others would not, for the financial outcome jobs elsewhere in Western Australia could not deliver.



Figure 14: Immigration Hall at Fremantle Port, October 2009.



Figure 15: A typical stone house in Italy, c. 1940s. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.



Figure 17: Pio & Miriam's wedding reception 1965. Photo courtesy Pio & Miriam Panizza.



Figure 16: Miriam Panizza at Port of Genoa 1965. Photo courtesy Miriam Panizza.



Figure 18: Wundowie's asbestos houses. Photo courtesy Pio Panizza.

Chapter Four - Wittenoom: the Men's Perspective

Because if here you earn ten cents won't you go where you can earn twenty?¹

Despite the isolation and difficult conditions, in the 1950s and 1960s 7,000 workers from 52 migrant groups, including 1,102 Italians, were employed at Wittenoom. Few of the Italians recruited in 1951 were fluent in English. These men signed the conditions of employment on the basis of what had been explained to them in Italian. Once they saw the conditions firsthand, some disputed what they had been told. Many of those without accompanying family left as soon as they could repay the air fare. During the mine's 23 year operation, the living and working conditions resulted in a highly transient population. Participants reported never having been told about the health dangers. As we shall see in Chapter Nine, CSR and the Department of Mines were aware of the hazards of asbestos exposure, but ignored or were slow in responding to the Department of Health and Mines Inspectors' warnings of the health risks to workers. In order to provide the foundations for their *sistemazione* later in Perth or back in Italy, Italians tolerated the conditions for longer periods than most other workers, particularly if accompanied by their families. Some, however, spent their money on gambling and drinking to alleviate the boredom and the isolation, forcing them to start again once they settled elsewhere.

The accounts of 11 ex-miners and millers, six wives and seven children inform this chapter. Through their stories and original photographs provided by them and the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, it is my intention to give the reader a sense of what life in this isolated town must have been like for the single and married men, particularly before the arrival of their wives and children. The participants' accounts reveal Italian workers' expectations before their arrival in Wittenoom, their first impressions, life in the town, the conditions in the mine and the mill, the occupational health and safety issues, why they stayed briefly or for so long, and their reasons for leaving. Despite subsequent workers being told of the difficult working conditions, news of the high earnings continued to draw them to

¹Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008. Her husband went directly to Wittenoom, having been recruited by Australian Blue Asbestos Limited in 1951.

the mining town. In 1966, to overcome their ongoing labour shortage, CSR widened their net to Lebanon, where they recruited twenty-six workers from Beirut.² Few Italians remained in the town. By 1966 when the mine closed, only 18 of the 140 families were Italian.³ A further attempt to attract Italians in Italy had failed.⁴

Why Wittenoom?: What the Italians Were Told

Most Italian migrants — whether they had come directly from Italy or were already in Western Australia — went to Wittenoom for the high earnings. A few would also go to experience outback Australia. The account of one Italian already living in Perth revealed yet another reason: “I had dated many women and decided to become engaged to one. So as not to have any problems with the others I left for Wittenoom”. Whatever their reasons, all workers were required to sign a “conditions of employment” document with ABA Limited to work in Wittenoom. Overseas recruits had to commit for two years, while those in Western Australia signed up for six months.

The first Italian miners to arrive in Wittenoom were part of the International Refugees Organization relocation of Displaced Persons in 1950.⁵ Those recruited in Italy by the Wittenoom mine manager, Paul Reagan, followed in 1951. The Lombard miners from the Seriana Valley arrived in February, followed in April by the *vermigliani* from the Trentino Alto Adige and in May by the coal miners from the Island of Elba.⁶ Most Italian workers eventually heard about Wittenoom by word of mouth. News of the job opportunity came from a family member or *paesano*, a chance meeting in Perth, while felling timber or working as a farm labourer in the remote Western Australian bush. One participant reported learning about

² National Archives of Australia, Perth: Department of Labour and National Service Western Australia. File no: 65/1153, Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Ltd. Wittenoom: Report of Industrial Officer's visit to Wittenoom on 15 & 16 May 1966 mentions the Lebanese workers.

³ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Department of Labour and National Service Western Australia. File no: 65/1153, Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Ltd. Wittenoom: List of residents in family homes at Wittenoom as at 6 March 1966.

⁴ 'Italians wanted' (1965) *The West Australian*, 24 December.

⁵ Interview with Maria Detoni, Perth, December 2010. Her husband's family was one of those displaced families.

⁶ The information regarding the arrival date of the Lombard miners was obtained during my interview with the children of Lombard miner, Attilio Oprandi — Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009. The information regarding the Trentino Alto Adige miners is contained in Hills, Op Cit. Chapter 4 and my interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Vermiglio, Italy, November 2008. The information regarding the Island of Elba miners was supplied during my interview with the two daughters of Island of Elba miner Romelio Caffieri, Maria Detoni and Nadia De Laurentis, Perth, December 2010.

work in Wittenoom one day as he walked by the ABA Limited Office in Perth, which advertised its employment opportunities. Those weary of timber cutting on the “Woodlines” out of Kalgoorlie or in Wundowie, Merredin and the southwest often decided to try Wittenoom.⁷ Young single men working as farm labourers tired of the life: up at sunrise — planting and harvesting crops, milking cows, and mending fences kangaroos had damaged — and in bed at dusk, with little hope of getting ahead on their meagre wages. One participant spoke of his days felling timber in Merredin. He was separated from his family for many days on end. Timber felling provided him with a good income, but it was no life for a man with a family.

The news of well-paid work and the availability of family housing if a man wanted to bring his wife and children made Wittenoom appealing to those unable to find work and/or seeking to reunite their family. The other enticement was Australian Blue Asbestos Limited's offer to advance the air fare, which workers were required to repay in weekly instalments. The company refunded it after workers had fulfilled their six month contract. The refund, however, did not apply to the air fare of a family member or of those workers who had been employed on a two year contract. Several participants reported being told the work was dirty and dangerous by others who had already been there. No one said the work could kill them, because the men who had told them about Wittenoom did not know. The plan of those who had decided to tolerate the conditions was to work hard and save enough money to resettle in Western Australia or return to Italy. The bone of contention of the early recruits was that the company's description of the conditions did not tally with what they found.

The early recruits complained that the working and living conditions did not match mine manager Paul Reagan's description, given during his visits to northern Italian towns in early 1951. The contract the men signed contained references to the work and living conditions.⁸ In light of the Lombard miners from the Seriana Valley and the Vermiglio recruits' version of what they had been told (outlined below) Reagan, most probably, skimmed over

⁷ See Bunbury, *Op Cit* for a discussion of life on the Woodlines.

⁸ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Department of Labour and National Service, Western Australia, File no. 65/1163: Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. Wittenoom contains a copy of this Conditions of Employment document.

the terms of the contract and concentrated on the potential earnings. By signing the “CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT” the recruits acknowledged that “This statement has been read to me (or translated to me in my language) and I am prepared to accept employment under these conditions”.

The working conditions were described as “in a confined space, in work areas averaging 42 inches [106 centimetres]”. This is at odds with one Mines Inspector’s report, in October 1950, which stated the stope height was 31 inches [79 centimetres].⁹ A miner needed to have an elementary level of English. Those without English were to be employed in the mill. In July 1951, as required under the Mines Regulation Act, 13 Italian miners were dismissed for failure to pass the language test.¹⁰ Such dismissals, however, cannot have been rigidly enforced. Of the group of nine contract workers who arrived in April from Vermiglio in the Trentino Alto Adige, only Attilio Slanzi spoke English, having learned it as an English prisoner of war.¹¹ Yet the nine had to work in the mine despite their lack of English and mining experience.¹² The other Italian workers, with their limited education, would have been in a similar position.¹³ The conditions of employment also made reference to summer temperatures — on average over 100 degrees Fahrenheit [37° Celsius]. There was no mention that Wittenoom was in a cyclone-prone area.¹⁴

Only the most determined would abide the conditions they found on their arrival.

What the Men Found

The plane flight, the view of the landscape it provided and the heat once they alighted have remained memorable for many, even if the airport was non-descript (see figure 21). For most of the men it was their first experience of a plane flight, and so was an adventure in itself. Paolo Del Casale explained “It was a little thing”.¹⁵ Arturo Della Maddalena added:

⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no.10593: Letter from A.E. Lloyd District Mines Inspector to State Mining Engineer, 13 October 1950.

¹⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10224: Senior Inspector of Mines letter to the State Mining Engineer, Department of Mines, 17 July 1951.

¹¹ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Trentino Alto Adige, Italy, November 2008. Slanzi was Pio Panizza’s uncle.

¹² Hills; Op Cit. See p. 36 for a full transcript of the letter.

¹³ See Reeder (1998), Op Cit. for a discussion of the introduction of compulsory primary education.

¹⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554.0: ‘The A.B.A. Story’ (1963), see Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Interview with Paolo Del Casale, Perth, December 2008.

“eight hours in a DC 3... from Perth to Wittenoom... up and down like a yo yo” (see figure 19).¹⁶ Ezio Belintende remembered that the plane, which seated about 10 to 12 passengers, had two propellers, little windows and “went up perhaps four, five, six hundred metres into the air”, so that the view of the countryside below “was spectacular” (see figure 20).¹⁷

The men were shocked by Wittenoom’s isolation, the intense heat, the accommodation and the working conditions. Paolo Del Casale’s first thought when he arrived in Wittenoom was: “I feel... if I was in gaol”.¹⁸ He had never experienced such isolation. The first night for Del Casale was particularly unnerving, as he listened to the howling of dingoes. Del Casale, like many others, wrote to his brothers in Italy about the high earnings at Wittenoom; two of them would eventually work there. Drawn together by the isolation, Del Casale forged new friendships, some from his hometown of Vasto in the region of Abruzzo, as well as with those of other nationalities and other Italian regions.

Arturo Della Maddalena commented on the image Wittenoom the place conjured up for him. “When I came off the plane, there was this friend with me...and I said to him...This is where they make the cowboy movies...It was Spinifex and these little hills (see figure 22).”¹⁹ Umberto Favero stayed until 2002, leaving after nearly 40 years in the town. He had been mesmerised by the haunting beauty of the landscape, the peacefulness and the wildlife of the Pilbara.²⁰ Wittenoom was, nevertheless, hell on earth for the workers, as Giacomo Bevacqua explained:

Wittenoom [was] a beautiful place, if you go as a tourist.
If you go there as a worker, it’s absolute hell.....Hell...
Just desert, red dust, Spinifex... men and 40 degrees in
the spring, summer was up to 45 degrees [113° F].²¹

The heat, a recurrent theme among the participants, endured into the night, until a north-easterly wind rose up making the night cold.

According to the first Vermiglio recruits, the Wittenoom manager had told them they were to work in a tunnel similar to the work on the Alpine passes — at odds with the

¹⁶ Interview with Arturo Della Maddalena, Perth, December 2008.

¹⁷ Interview with Ezio Belintende, Sondrio, Italy, November 2008.

¹⁸ The notion of being in gaol was voiced by a number of workers in Wittenoom. See also Layman (1994), *Op Cit.* pp. 313-14.

¹⁹ Interview with Arturo Della Maddalena, Perth, December 2008.

²⁰ Interview with Umberto Favero, Perth, October 2009.

²¹ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

description of the mine in the conditions of work — and that the climate was similar to theirs. In the Italian Alps during the coldest month of winter it snows and temperatures fall below zero. The Vermiglio men's letter to their Italian Consul-General revealed the inconsistencies:

The water burns in the winter... The work here is actually in an asbestos mine... We had never worked in mines, but here, after a day or so outside, we were forced to do so because, by refusing, we did not know what sanctions we may be contravening.²²

Shocked by the conditions, Attilio Slanzi wrote the letter to the Italian Consul-General to plead for their transfer to Tasmania. Other *vermigliani* were already working there and had reported a climate similar to their region in Italy.²³ In far-removed Melbourne, the Consul disregarded the Italian workers' plea. Instead, he wrote to the Premier of Western Australia saying: "I think that with your courteous help I should try to keep them at Wittenoom Gorge where they are probably badly needed".²⁴ As a consequence, the men and their families had to stay for two years. In debt to the company for their travel expenses and with their accompanying families to support, they had no other choice.²⁵

Two months earlier, in February 1951, ten experienced miners from the Seriana Valley of Lombardy reported a similar experience. All but one, who was sponsoring his family, left upon repayment of the air fare. Attilio Oprandi, in a letter back home, explained what they had found. It also revealed by how many degrees the temperature could exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit:

There were only miners' houses, the hotel and store and huts for single men and a red burnt earth and the type of vegetation called Spinifex, which thrives where there is little water. The heat was intolerable, from 45 to 55°C.²⁶
The mine was very low. You had to walk on all fours.
Luckily for us, we stayed there only a short while...
Otherwise we surely would have perished.²⁷

Pio Panizza, also from the village of Vermiglio in the Trentino Alto Adige, recalled putting up with temperatures which he remembered reaching 46° Celsius [115°F]. Inside the mine, Pio spoke of temperatures as high as 50° Celsius [122°F]: "You had to put up with it. It

²² Hills, Op Cit. p. 36.

²³ Hills, Op Cit. pp. 36-7. Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Trentino Alto Adige, Italy, November 2008. Pio explained that his uncle had written the letter.

²⁴ Layman (1992), Op Cit. p. 187.

²⁵ Hills, Op Cit. pp. 36-37.

²⁶ 113° F to 131° F.

²⁷ Covelli et al., Op Cit. p. 127.

was pointless [to complain] because it was hot in the forest also [in Western Australia where many Italians, including Pio had already worked]. You had no choice. Where would you go?”²⁸ Many arrived home from night shift in the early morning, unable to shower because the water was already too hot. The water was hot because the water pipes ran for over 11 kilometres above ground. The town water came from the rock pools and a natural spring in the Colonial Gorge, kept fresh from an inflow from underground streams.²⁹ If the men did not shower in the cold water of the gorge on exiting the mine or mill, they had to wait until late in the evening for the water to be cool enough. Arturo Della Maddalena came to enjoy the heat and that he could dress in shorts and thongs; the casualness in Wittenoom appealed to the 18 year old lad.

Giulio Santini, who went to Wittenoom in 1960, confirmed why many of the Italians would accept the poor occupational health and safety conditions at Wittenoom: “The life wasn’t very nice. The work wasn’t very nice. The money wasn’t too bad”.³⁰ Those who stayed had no choice but to adapt to the conditions in the mine and mill.³¹

The Mine

CSR had taken over the primitive Wittenoom mine in 1943, despite the company's lack of experience in asbestos mining. In 1944, K. O. Brown, by the 1950s ABA Limited's Managing Director, visited the Yampire Gorge mine, describing it as no dustier than ABA's Wittenoom operation.³²

²⁸ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Trentino Alto Adige, Italy, November 2008.

²⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story, (1963) Chapter 11.

³⁰ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

³¹ Accounts of working conditions have also been reported elsewhere in Layman (1983), Op Cit. McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. Layman (1992), Op Cit. Musk et al. (1992), Op Cit. Layman (1994), Op Cit. Merler (1999), Op Cit. McCulloch (2006), Op Cit.

³² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10131.00: K.O. Brown's report of his visit to Wittenoom and Yampire Gorge asbestos mines, 1944.



Figure 19: The DC 3. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

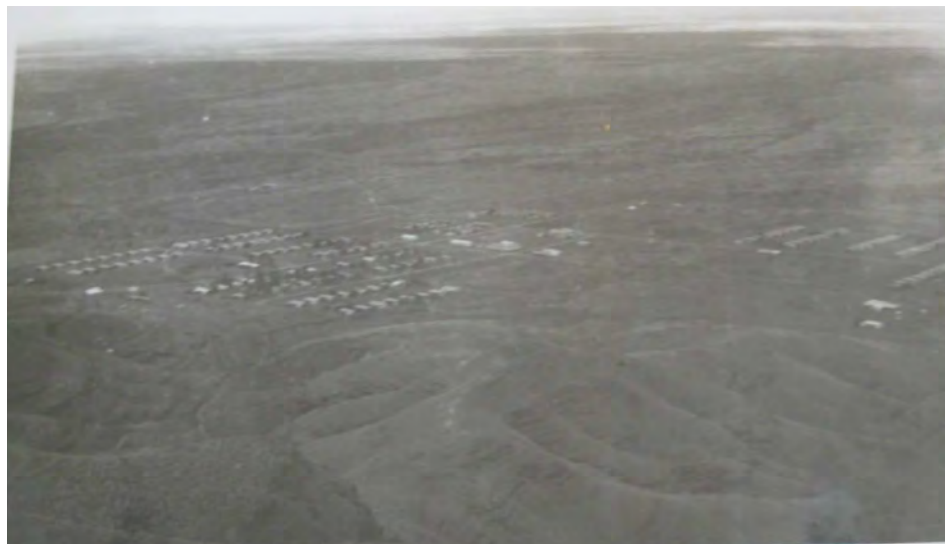


Figure 20: Aerial view of Wittenoom, circa 1957. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 21: Entrance to Wittenoom airport. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 22: The Spinifex grass which covers the Hamersley Ranges. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

Yet within two years of CSR's acquisition of the mining leases, Inspector of Mines Adams informed the State Mining Engineer "good miners [to Wittenoom] are scarce even in peace time as they prefer the amenities of Kalgoorlie to the crudities of the Yampire Gorge"; a view confirmed by ticketed Australian miners who went to Wittenoom in the 1940s, but quickly left.³³ The poor working conditions in the mine contributed to the transient workforce (see figures 23 & 24).

Before his decision to emigrate, Pio Panizza had worked on the Bissina Dam project, in the Italian Alps of the Trentino Alto Adige in the 1950s. He arrived in Wittenoom in 1959, long after Inspector Adams' report on the dusty conditions and the departure of most of the Lombard and Vermiglio miners. By this time the move from the Wittenoom Gorge mine to the new, improved Colonial mine and mill had occurred. This move had had more to do with increasing production than an attempt to improve the working conditions. Pio Panizza, like the Lombard and Vermiglio miners, was shocked by the conditions he found in the mine. Panizza's uncle, Attilio Slanzi, had suggested he go to Wittenoom as a miner if he wanted to earn good money. It would seem uncle Attilio had forgotten the letter he had penned to the Italian Consul in April 1951 about the conditions.³⁴ Panizza refused the work. "When I saw that I would have to go for eight hours into that mine... I felt sick", he told me.³⁵ The Italian supervisor decided to put him to work driving the locomotives which transported the ore to the mill. He would not have stayed at Wittenoom otherwise. In any case he lasted less than a year, due to an accident (see figure 25).

Given the cramped working conditions in the stopes, each morning as the miners prepared for work, they must have questioned the pronouncement on the company signboard which greeted them as they entered the mine: "Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. Let us strive to make it a happier place to work" (see figure 26).³⁶ The workers strived to make the money required for them to leave, but CSR's attempts to improve conditions in the workplace would always be spasmodic. Day shift workers were up early. Giacomo Bevacqua

³³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10571: Inspector of Mines Adams writing to the State Mining Engineer, 24 October 1945. See Williams, *Op Cit* for an account of a ticketed Australian miner's view of Wittenoom.

³⁴ Hills, *Op Cit*. pp. 36-37.

³⁵ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

³⁶ Michael Ryan, 1966, 'DEATH of a TOWN', *The Age*, Friday, 9 December.

was out of bed by 6.30 a.m. and needed to “be quick or I would miss the bus”, he told me. “You had breakfast at the mess, made your lunch and caught the bus at 7 a.m.” The choice of breakfast available in the working man’s mess was typically Australian: baked beans, bacon, fried eggs, poached eggs and lamb chops. While not what the men would have eaten in Italy, they adapted. At least two Italians — Tony Martino and Giovanni Caffieri — spent part of their working day as bus drivers, transporting the men to and from the mine and mill.³⁷ If the worker missed the bus, he missed his shift. To reach their workplace (about 11 kilometres from the town) the bus went along a winding, rocky road which ended up at the picturesque Wittenoom Gorge. In the rainy season, when the road flooded the men were unable to get to work (see figures 27-29).

Some fifty years later, Pio Panizza still remembered much of the workings of the mine. The reason for his refusal to work in the conditions becomes evident in his description of the work, confirmed by the accounts of Giacomo Bevacqua, Antonio Casella, Tullio Rodigari and Ezio Belintende. The men worked in stopes (shafts) 70 centimetres (32 inches) high, bent over for eight hours a day. The mine, which contained six or seven layers of asbestos, had been dug into the mountain side, with a single entry tunnel. The locomotives entered via this tunnel to collect the ore. A miner carried his own work tools, explosives and a drill, as he walked about 100 to 200 metres to the stope face. He then dug the holes and planted the dynamite. All the charges were ignited simultaneously at the end of the shift. Another team then went in to create an open area and the support pillars (the area of host rock which had not been blasted) to hold up the roof. The width of these support pillars was three to four metres. Once these tasks had been completed, a team of scrapers went in to remove the blasted rock containing the asbestos fibre.

³⁷ Interviews with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010; Maria Detoni and Nadia De Laurentis, Perth, December 2010.



Figure 23: Miner Toni Ranieri c. 1957. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 24: Covered in dust and fibre. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 25: Locomotive transporting the ore. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 26: The entrance (adit) to the mine c. 1957. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 27: Section of the road to the mine. N.A.A Perth: Dept of Civil Aviation File 67/1265.



Figure 28: Section of road to the mine. N.A.A. Perth: Dept of Civil Aviation File 67/1265.



Figure 29: Section of road to the mine. N.A.A. Perth: Dept of Civil Aviation File 67/1265.

Antonio Casella arrived in Wittenoom in September 1966, when unbeknown to workers, the decision had already been made to close the mine. Casella, employed as a scraper, had a sense that he was working in a dangerous situation. However, his fear had to do not with disease, but rather the possibility of a cave-in, because they were two or three hundred feet underground. He spurred himself on with “if other people can do it, so can I”! (see figure 30).³⁸

There were varying reports about the amount of dust in the mine among the participants. These seemed to depend on whether the miner used water to wash down the walls in preparation for mining the ore. Water was available to wash down the faces, but not all miners did, in order to speed up the process to earn more money. The poor ventilation, dustiness and heat made the task an onerous one. Giacomo Bevacqua, a machine miner, recalled using the hose to have a drink, wash himself and the rock face down and then continue working. His focus was on making enough money to go back to Italy. There was an area assigned for eating lunch, but as Bevacqua explained: “There was a lot of people who was workin’ on contract basis. So you couldn’t afford to spend your time there... You keepin’ goin’”. (see figure 31).³⁹

Attilio Oprandi told a similar story. He explained to a visitor to his home, years after his time in Wittenoom, that he was never concerned about the dust. They had hoses to dampen the rock to keep down the dust. In contrast, inside and outside the mill the dust was always thick. What was difficult for the over six foot tall Attilio was the very low roof levels, requiring him to work bent over.⁴⁰ Once the miners and scrapers had finished, Pio Panizza entered with his locomotive towing 40 or 50 wagons. Another man sat behind him to ensure each wagon was filled with the ore. From the mine the ore was then transported and placed on conveyor belts to the mill. This process went on during the two shifts in the mine. Pio Panizza recalls it was so dusty that “you could see where you were excavating and that’s it”.⁴¹

³⁸ Interview with Antonio Casella conducted by Susanna Iuliano, Perth, 2005.

³⁹ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

⁴⁰ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.

⁴¹ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

The Italians' reputation for high productivity was widely acknowledged. This included the Johns-Manville representative, C. D. Borrer, who commented during his 1952 visit to Wittenoom:

Whereas an Australian might drill 20 holes with a jackhammer, an Italian miner during the same period of time will drill 35... the Italians seem quite happy with their situation and... are sending back to Italy for their brothers, uncles, etc. If this condition should continue, it is possible that the future labour situation at Wittenoom will not present a great problem despite the isolated location.⁴²

Nevertheless, workers' transience would continue to be an issue throughout the life of the mine. Two men, Toni Ranieri and Joe Potalivo, stood out as top miners during their time in Wittenoom, earning the respect of everyone in the town.⁴³ One newspaper report revealed another — Umberto Favero. Favero told a journalist, "One year I earned more than the mine manager. The boss earned \$11,000 and I took home \$12,000".⁴⁴ By 1963 miners were earning an average of £10/10/- [\$21] and the scrapers £ 9 [\$18] per shift.⁴⁵ In contrast, at least one experienced Lombard miner reported being dissatisfied with the pay. Evaristo Scandella wrote home that "the work is soul destroying and the remuneration is not adequate".⁴⁶

Those with specific goals such as marriage, the purchase of a home, business, car or the return air fare to Italy tolerated the conditions and the persistent coughs they developed for the financial reward. Attilio Oprandi believes two things saved him from becoming ill: firstly, he left Wittenoom very soon after his arrival and secondly, he was in the mine, where the dust levels were kept down with the use of water, unlike in the mill.⁴⁷

⁴² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10908.00: Johns-Manville memorandum 18 April 1952. C. V. Miller to various executives re: Johns-Manville representative, C. D. Borrer's visit to Australia.

⁴³ Interviews with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009; Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁴⁴ Hugh Schmitt, 1990, 'WITTENOOM: race for survival', *The West Australian*, Saturday 8 September, sec. Big Weekend.

⁴⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12.

⁴⁶ Covelli et al., *Op Cit.* p. 127.

⁴⁷ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009. The use of water in the mine yielded conflicting stories from the workers and the Mines Department Inspectors. There were reports of some using water and others not. See Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10261: Mines Inspector Boyland's report to the State Mining Engineer, 14 February 1950. It was certainly an issue for the AWU secretary who brought the high levels of dust in the mine and the mill to the attention of the State Mining Engineer. See Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10146: A.W.U. secretary Oliver's letter to the State Mining Engineer, 19 April 1948.

The Mill

The mill was located just below the mine (see figure 32). From the workers' accounts and the reports of the Mines Department Inspectors, the dust levels there were higher in comparison to the mine, despite the inadequate equipment used to measure them, until just before the mine's closure in 1966.⁴⁸ There were a number of duties to be carried out in the mill, with the most recently employed man shifted from one task to another as needed.

Once the ore had been fed on to the conveyor belt the milling process began (see figure 33). The first area was the picking belt where men removed any rock devoid of fibre (see figure 34). The ore was crushed to extract the fibre, described by several participants as being like sewing cotton or filaments (see figure 36). The fibre was then aspirated to remove the dust created in the process. Water was not used to contain the dust levels as it reduced the fibre quality, even though at one stage the company had indicated it would introduce water to keep down the dust.⁴⁹ The dust was so abrasive that within hours it had made holes in the ducts, showering everyone in the mill below with fibre. The ducts were often simply repaired with hessian bags (see figure 35).

The dust then escaped into the atmosphere where it was sucked back into the mine. From the mill, it also travelled on the winds to the executives' settlement, a kilometre away, then on to the township, as well as into the rivers, swimming holes and gorges which are found throughout the Hamersley Ranges. The mill sweepers could never keep up with the dust produced during the milling process, unless production had been slowed or stopped to prepare for the expected arrival of the Mines Inspector or for maintenance to the machinery, which usually occurred at the end of a shift (see figure 37).

Tullio Rodigari, an electrician, monitored the operation of the hundreds of belts which drove the conveyor system. He considered himself lucky to be working above ground in the mill, rather than the mine. There were about 300 motors to check, as well as the various conveyor belts which moved the ore from one section to another during the milling process.

⁴⁸ See the report of Major, G. (1968), 'Asbestos dust exposure', Proceedings of the First Pneumoconiosis Conference (Sydney, Australia).

⁴⁹ See Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10593: District Mines Inspector Lloyd's report to the State Mining Engineer, 13 October 1950.

The motors required ongoing maintenance because of the insidious nature of the crushed ferrous rock, which even penetrated the small internal pads. As a consequence, every 20 days or so, these pads were replaced due to wear. Rodigari explained:

There were belts... chains... if a belt stopped the whole operation stopped... If a chain stopped or a belt or a motor or anything like that stopped, I had to be ready to stop the others. Otherwise there would be a backlog of material.⁵⁰

The crushing of the ore was completed by machines, which Rodigari explained were also worn down by the dust. In the final bagging stage the use of machinery was not possible. The bagging section is remembered by several of the research participants (see figure 38). It is where the most recently arrived workers were placed. The asbestos fibre adhered to the workers as they manually stuffed the soft fibre into the hessian bags. Giulio Santini remembers his first visit to the mill and the role of the Aborigines who worked for ABA Ltd.

It was summertime... nice sunny day... We went to have a look because I never been into the bagging shed... I went to one door... with the sun reflection... Inside it was like when it's snowing... the asbestos particles were flying everywhere... that's where the unfortunate people which left life early... plus there were also lots of Aborigines, which they used to transport [the bags] from Wittenoom Gorge to Port Hedland... They used to travel on the back of the truck on top of the bags.⁵¹

The tailings (mill waste) were simply discarded after having been loaded onto ABA Limited trucks or given to town residents to spread on the red earth to keep down the red dust. Tony Martino was one of those drivers. He explained that he was always prepared to do whatever job was available for the extra money, because he had to support his family of five children. At night, after finishing his work as bus driver, Tony drove one of the ABA trucks to the chute in the mill, filled it with the asbestos tailings, and then drove over the hills to dump it (see figure 39). Tony spoke about the dust:

They were "Macs", huge trucks. You would tip... the dust was galore... You go like this [he is running his finger over the table top] and the dust... You didn't know what to do with it... You never thought about it... but it wasn't good for us. I knew it wasn't good for us. Nobody warn us about that, but we knew ourselves eating the dust wasn't healthy for us. But we didn't know anybody died from that.⁵²

⁵⁰ Interview with Tullio Rodigari, Italy, November 2008.

⁵¹ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

⁵² Interview with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.



Figure 30: Descent into the lower levels of the mine. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 31: The lunch room in the mine. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.

In the mill, apart from working as electricians, Italians were employed as carpenters, mechanics and boilermakers to undertake repairs. Shifts in the mill fluctuated between two and three depending on the amount of ore mined. Mill workers earned a fixed wage — unlike the miners who were paid according to their productivity. By 1963 the basic wage for mill workers was £14/14/1 [\$29.40] and a district allowance of £2/5/- [\$4.50].⁵³ Yet the millers had to endure much dustier conditions. Tullio Rodigari recalls that he had to work overtime to earn good money. It was common to work two shifts because people took 'sickies' after payday to play two up. Arturo Della Maddalena considered he earned a good salary in the mill only once he was appointed supervisor.

Occupational Health and Safety

The "CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT" also contained the company's regulations regarding work attire. The worker was to supply these, but with the approval of ABA Ltd management. Workers had also to agree to be responsible for all safety clothing and equipment issued by the Company. They would be refused employment for failure to follow the regulations. In reality refusal of employment was rarely, if ever, enforced.⁵⁴

Photographs reveal that the only safety equipment the company provided was a safety helmet and respirators. The company compelled "no man... to wear a respirator, but no check is made on the man who wishes to wear one. The issue is free on demand without question".⁵⁵ Dr Jim McNulty, the Chest Physician and Mines Medical Officer from 1957 until the 1960s, reported that the high volumes of dust in the mill and in the mine clogged the respirator within minutes.⁵⁶ The high temperatures made it impossible to wear the respirators for any great length of time. Giacomo Bevacqua remembers being given a mask but "It was too hot. There was no ventilation. You had to breathe with full lungs all the time... Little

⁵³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12.

⁵⁴ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Department of Labour and National Service Western Australia. File no. 65/1153. Subject: Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. Wittenoom.

⁵⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit 10133: Correspondence from ABA Limited to the Western Australian Employers Federation, 14 February 1957.

⁵⁶ The dust nuisance was mentioned regularly as a concern, but was sometimes played down in the reports of the Mines Inspectors during their visits to Wittenoom throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits contain Mines Inspectors' reports on the conditions and dust counts during these decades.

oxygen. Imagine how much dust you swallow”?⁵⁷ Antonio Casella recalls workers being asked to wear masks, but also recalls them saying: “This is nonsense! I’m not going to wear this! In fact, I don’t think I wore it” (see figure 42). While some of the workers realised that “the dust was no good”, workers like Antonio Casella did not realise “how severe it was; no one ever explained to us about asbestos-related diseases”.⁵⁸ This is a telling comment, since Antonio Casella, unlike most migrant workers, spoke English fluently.

The working conditions were such that while the men wore their helmets, many worked bare-chested or in singlets because of the heat which caused the workers to sweat profusely, with dirt and fibre attaching to the men’s skin (see figure 43). Surviving workers and the miners’ widows recall the deep gashes to the men’s backs, suffered as a result of the constant brushing up against the jagged roof line of the stopes. Giacomo Bevacqua recalled, “the roof was all stones. If you touch, they split you in half”.⁵⁹ Just as the wounds were on the verge of healing, workers would inadvertently brush against the roof causing them to open up and bleed. In any case the scarring remained. There was no equipment to protect knees and shins as the men remained bent over during their eight hour shift. There are conflicting accounts of the stope height — between 31 and 42 inches — among workers and Mines Inspectors. The photograph of one young Italian revealed his ingenuity, with his use of cricket pads to protect his knees and shins (see figure 41).

⁵⁷ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

⁵⁸ Interview conducted by Susana Iuliano with Antonio Casella, Perth, 2005.

⁵⁹ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.



Figure 32: The four levels of the mill directly below the mine. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 33: The conveyor carrying the ore to the picking belt. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 34: The picking belt. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 35: Makeshift repairs to the ducts with hessian sacks. Photo



Figure 36: Blue asbestos fibre. Photo courtesy Peter Gordon.

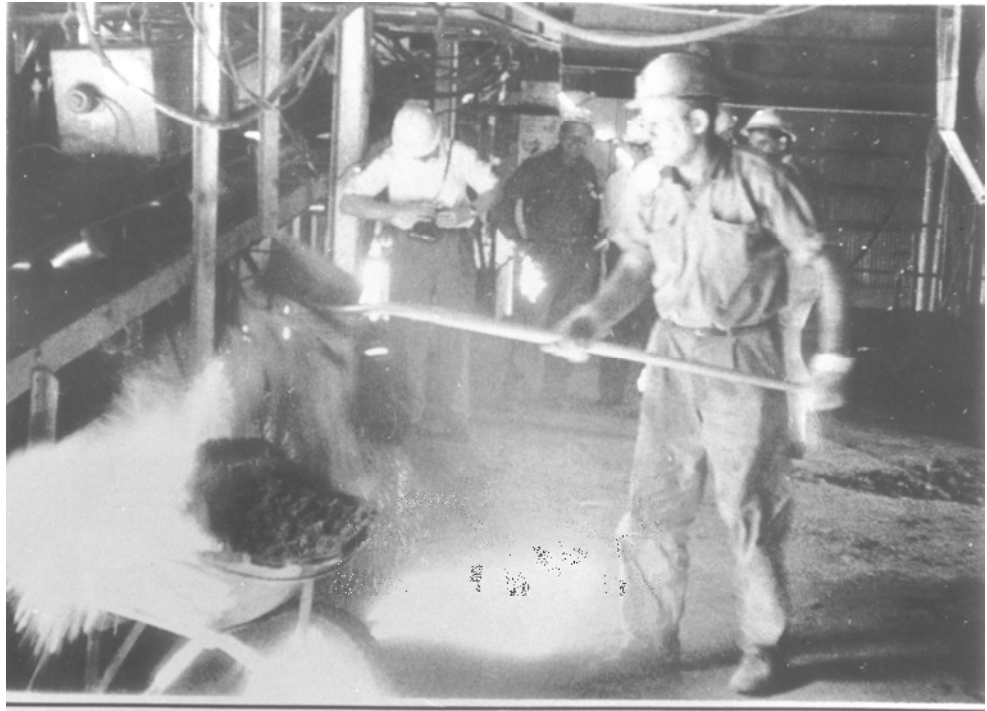


Figure 37: Cleaning up the mill, c. 1965. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 38: Baggers in the mill, c. early 1960s. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 39: Tailings strewn across the Wittenoom landscape. Photo courtesy Peter Gordon.



Figure 40: Miner with helmet but no respirator. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.

When asked about the health risks Pio Panizza replied: "What was there to say? There were those... poor guys... as they say...but they weren't unfortunate... They were the types that you just told them what to do, and they worked independently." To the question had he known about asbestosis and other mining diseases, Panizza's response was quite simply: "No." He then added:

We knew it was an asbestos mine and you worked.....and that's it... It wasn't known... The "big wigs" maybe knew that asbestos was harmful, but they didn't ever say anything. It came out later, when the first were to become ill. Then it came out.⁶⁰

The experienced Lombard and Island of Elba miners had prior knowledge with which to compare the work conditions, just as Mines Inspector Hunter did during an AWU hearing in 1949 based on his visits to other mines in Western Australia.⁶¹ Most of the Italians who went to Wittenoom, on the other hand, had had no mining experience. Ezio Belintende, a textile worker in Italy, recalled the comments of an older Italian miner with whom he worked in Wittenoom. Parolo, a man from a town nearby Belintende's in Lombardy, told him: "Look, it's no good here".⁶² Just what "no good" meant was never made clear to Belintende because the company never informed him or his work mates about asbestos-related diseases. The experienced miners most likely knew about silicosis and tuberculosis from their experiences in European mines, but not asbestos-related diseases.

Some participants also spoke of accidents in the mine, as well as deaths unrelated to mining, but which perhaps were linked to the consequences of the working conditions and Wittenoom's isolation. One Polish man hanged himself; another of German or French nationality also took his own life.

Flying rock shards, men falling down chutes and cave-ins caused injuries, prompting early departures. The more fortunate somehow broke their fall, hanging on for dear life until they were rescued. One accident (the result of two Italian workmates squabbling) involved a locomotive. Valentino Faustinelli, from Brescia in northern Italy, was always sent out of the mine to get any equipment needed by his work mate, Franco Miotti, two years his senior.

⁶⁰ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

⁶¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10151, Australian Workers' Union hearing, p. 79.

⁶² Interview with Ezio Belintende, Italy, November 2008.

Faustinelli did so begrudgingly, with his apparently characteristic complaining: *“Ma porco della malora! Mi mandi sempre fuori! Perché non ci vai tu una volta!”*⁶³ For once Miotti agreed to a change in routine. Miotti was injured by the locomotive, which ran over his leg. The danger of injury from the dynamite was always a possibility, as happened to a man from the city of Trento (the capital of the Trentino Alto-Adige region), blinded as the result of an explosion. One wife recalled her husband’s warnings about the dangers of unexploded powder and the signs to look for when going back to remove the rock.⁶⁴ This man, her husband had hypothesized, must have run his tool over the powder, causing it to explode in his face. The shift in the mine always ended with the setting off of the explosives to break up the host rock.⁶⁵

Despite the conditions, there were no accounts among research participants of Italians approaching the union (the Australian Workers Union — AWU) with complaints. According to ABA Limited, “Wittenoom, literally, has no record of a strike”.⁶⁶ Layman noted that the Wittenoom workers did not display resistance to management strategies of control typical in other mining communities. At Wittenoom, they were neither militant nor radical and trade unionism at the mine was characterized by apathy and inactivity.⁶⁷ It is evident from participants’ accounts that the Italians had one goal in Wittenoom: to earn enough to enable a better sistemazione elsewhere. Their lack of English and, no doubt, fear of losing their job would have stopped most from complaining; even though Giacomo Bevacqua spoke of his protests to ABA. On several occasions, Bevacqua demanded that the ore he had mined be weighed again because, he argued, the amount had been understated.⁶⁸

⁶³ Damn it! You are always sending me out! Why don’t you go out for once!?

⁶⁴ She did not elaborate upon the signs to look for during our conversation.

⁶⁵ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit. p. 258.

⁶⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12.

⁶⁷ Layman (1983), Op Cit. p. 1.

⁶⁸ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.



Figure 41: A young Italian uses his ingenuity to protect his knees for work in the low stopes. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 42: Toni Ranieri modelling a respirator. Photo courtesv Sue Ranieri.



Figure 43: Men working bare-chested. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.

Other Jobs

No doubt discouraged by the dusty mill conditions and the low stope heights in the mine, some men preferred the other jobs on offer at Wittenoom. Italians were also employed in the General Store, the Single Men's mess, the Italian café or as drivers. The more entrepreneurial Italians established businesses in the town. Mario Sterpini and later Giacomo Bevacqua and his wife Lidia ran the Single Men's mess. Sterpini also set up an Italian style bar which by the mid 1960s had a Sicilian *barista*.⁶⁹ *Barista* Rossi made a good *espresso* coffee and Italian *gelati* with the machines Sterpini had imported.

In the early 1960s, Giacomo Bevacqua explained that Sterpini had tired of running the Single Men's mess and offered it to him and his wife. Bevacqua and his wife Lidia, fed up with life in the town, were at the Wittenoom petrol station filling up their car for the 1,600 kilometre trip back to Perth when Sterpini made them the offer. The Bevacquas' Hungarian accountant (and godfather to their daughter born in 1964) prepared the papers to seal the agreement. The husband and wife team regenerated interest in the mess: they provided an appetising menu and refurbished the mess with new furniture, air conditioning and upgraded kitchen. By the time the Bevacquas left in 1966, the couple had amassed savings of \$46,000.

In between driving the bus to transport workers to the mine and mill, children to school or the kindergarten, Tony Martino worked in the General Store/warehouse as assistant manager. He distributed and delivered furniture to the new arrivals, as well as organizing the cleaning of vacated houses. He also made the General Store deliveries to the executives' wives in the settlement in his *Kombi van*. He recalls the demanding wife of one executive who became quite indignant if her specific requests were not met, such as her preference for pink toilet paper. His other driving duties included chauffeuring the visiting overseas executives from the airport to the settlement and on sightseeing tours of the area.

Life in Wittenoom

Many of the Italians tolerated the working conditions and life in Wittenoom, just as they had had to endure their impoverished lives in Italy. At least now many were earning

⁶⁹ Barman able to operate the commercial machine for making espresso coffee.

large sums of money, which some squandered on gambling and drinking. As they adapted, they also attempted to inject a sense of normality and humour into their daily lives. Notwithstanding the sense of community which many participants recalled, class distinctions were apparent.

There were two community hubs. There was the Settlement for the executives built by CSR, one kilometre from the picturesque Wittenoom Gorge, not far from the mine and mill. Tony Martino remembers there were eight or nine houses in the settlement.⁷⁰ I asked him to compare the Settlement with the Wittenoom Township:

They were like slum places [the houses in town]....[The settlement] was like Dalkeith.....you know it? The Settlement homes were there from day one... big homes.....luxury homes... very spacious... There was a board meeting home... to entertain the "big nobs" from interstate and overseas. Lots of facilities: the best of the best.⁷¹

Dalkeith, he explained, is one of Perth's wealthier suburbs, whereas the Wittenoom Township was comparable to Balga, a working class suburb of Perth. The workers and their families, on the other hand, lived in the township, eleven kilometres away (see figure 44). The Western Australian Housing Commission had built the family homes, while the company had built the Settlement for the executives and the single men's quarters, which came to be known as "Death Row". From available photographs and the men's stories, the single men's accommodation changed from tents to tin sheds and, eventually, dormitory style accommodation (see figure 45).

In 1949, board and lodgings in the town's single men's hut was 35 shillings per week [\$3.50] (see figures 46 & 47).⁷² Several participants compared their living conditions to a chicken coop or a *baracca*.⁷³ "Ever seen a chicken shed in your back yard"?, Giacomo Bevacqua asked me. I described the one my father had built in our back yard in 1960. "Tin roof... exactly like your chicken shed... you sleeping in this. So, just imagine 40 or 50 degrees outside... My God... Oh my God!" His voice trailed off: "Oh, my God!" Arturo Della Maddalena

⁷⁰ There were actually thirteen according to ABA Limited records. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 1.

⁷¹ Interview with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁷² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10151: Australian Workers' Union Hearing, 9 June 1949, p. 74.

⁷³ shed

described a similar scene: “*Erano quattro mura e una lamiera... noi in Italia ci mettevamo le galline e il maiale*”.⁷⁴ To keep cool in the hut at night, Bevacqua recalled wetting the floor which became muddy as he rolled in it. Ezio Belintende would get up in the middle of the night to turn the mattress over once it had become wet with his perspiration. According to the workers who arrived in the 1950s, there were no furnishings in the single men’s quarters. These had to be purchased from the General Store. To save money many used the ammunition boxes to construct makeshift chairs, tables and beds.

The family homes, made of asbestos, comprised of two or three bedrooms, with three verandas. Climbing plants were trained over the verandas to keep the house cool (see figure 48). Tony Martino described the Coolgardie safe with its timber frame, wire, Spinifex and piped water dripping from the top, as a fan blew air through it, which was also used to cool the family home. To save money, families too used ammunition boxes to create their own makeshift furniture; the more skilful husbands created storage cupboards for their wives from off cuts left by the company’s carpenters. In the garden, to keep down the red dust, the company tipped a truckload of asbestos tailings, free of charge. “Just imagine your kids? My daughter used to play over there, in the dust”, Giacomo Bevacqua recalled.⁷⁵ Italians and other migrants established vegetable gardens and flower beds; the local stone was used to create edges for the gardens, or to build paths and fountains.

By the time of the Martino family’s arrival in 1963, rather than having to buy necessary household items from the General Store, the company was supplying them to workers free of charge, according to Tony Martino. One of Martino’s many jobs was to distribute the items.

In my time they had a big warehouse with beds, double, single, bunks, baby high chairs, everything which you need in the house...all the essential items...pans, pots, *coltelli* (knives). I had a list of what to give... by the company... I had a little Kombi van... We made a couple of trips... deliver everything there... When they gone... we go and collect them... If nobody come for two or three weeks... tidied the house up... and supply again... Had a couple of cleaners... You bring your own bedding. Mattress, we supply... When somebody else come, if mattress shabby... we throw in the tip... and give new

⁷⁴ It was four walls and a tin roof...in Italy we used to put the chickens and the pig there.

⁷⁵ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

mattresses... Pretty good for that... because I done it myself, that's why... know about it... I can't remember the man, woman maltreated by the company... The company alright over there... because they want you to stay there.⁷⁶

The cost of living was nonetheless high. It meant families took some time to save money and so they stayed more than two years. Half of the participants with whom I spoke, or who were mentioned during fieldwork, reflected the median stay of seven months: two miners stayed between one to three months, nine miners stayed between seven to nine months, five miners (three with families) stayed between one to four years, and five miners (all with families) between five to 10 years; one miner remained in the Pilbara at Wittenoom for nearly 40 years. Available cost of living statistics during an Australian Workers' Union hearing in 1949 gives some idea of the costs in comparison to earnings. In 1949, the basic wage for a worker (in the mill) in Wittenoom was £6/15/1 [\$13.50] plus 30/- [\$3] district allowance totalling £ 8/5/1 [\$16.50]. For a family the costs per week accounted for a considerable amount of those earnings. The grocery store account was between £ 5 and £ 5/10s [\$10 and \$11] weekly. Rent per week was 30/- [\$3]. Added to these expenses were: the Mineworkers Relief Fund of 1/- [10 cents] per week, the Flying doctor service 9d [approximately 8 cents] per week and Company bus 6/- [60 cents] per week. A refrigerator was £120 [\$240]. One of the popular forms of entertainment in the town, the open air picture theatre, had a 3/- [30 cents] entrance fee per person.⁷⁷ A one way air fare at that time was £14/10/-, [\$29] with an amount taken out of a worker's weekly earnings by ABA Limited until it was repaid.

Life in Wittenoom did not consist solely of work; the men found ways to deal with the isolation and the harsh conditions. In one show of solidarity, and to make light of their situation, Mario Tamburri, Toni Ranieri and a number of their friends shaved their heads to keep the fibre from sticking to their hair as they worked in the mine or mill (see figure 49).⁷⁸ At the end of their working day, the men climbed back on the bus to town, with most stopping at the Fortescue Hotel to cool down (see figure 50). In 1946 this had been one of a number

⁷⁶ Interview with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁷⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10151: 9 June 1949, Australian Workers Hearing, p.72.

⁷⁸ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth October 2009. Interview with Sue Ranieri, Perth, December 2010.

of amenities and recreation facilities CSR had agreed to provide. If the asbestos industry was to progress, “proper living accommodation for the men and their families and reasonable amenities and recreation facilities were essential”. By the 1950s, it was proving difficult to attract a steady labour force and, therefore, impacting on the mine’s output.⁷⁹ The company established more amenities in order to entice people to stay. These included the General Store, butcher’s shop, bakery, cafeteria, library, billiard room, café, the [*Picture Gardens*] cinema, a tennis court, the race course, cricket and football grounds and the employees’ amenities building.⁸⁰ In time these amenities, coupled with the town’s isolation, fostered a tightly-knit community. Among the Italian men regional loyalties seem to have receded as they sought connection and solace with others in a similar position. In fact, whatever their country or Italian region of provenance, firm friendships developed and many of these continue to this day.

To overcome their isolation and feelings of loneliness the Italian men engaged in a variety of activities, some of which were reminiscent of their lives back in their home towns. Their stories and photographs reveal the light-hearted antics, the drinking of Australian beer to beat the heat, swimming in the gorges, hunting unattended cattle or native animals, helping each other with their washing, playing soccer and horse shoe throwing, amusing their landlord’s children, or just lying around in their huts (see figures 51 - 53). In keeping with the spirit of an American Wild West town, some of the men even dressed the part of the cowboy (see figure 54). Available photographs also suggest the men’s loneliness and reveal the few adornments on the walls of their sparsely furnished quarters: the picture of a popular Hollywood beauty of the time, the odd shotgun and suitcase. The musicians — among them Toni Ranieri and Romelio Caffieri — entertained with their piano accordion or guitar playing (see figures 55 & 56). Some of the younger men owned radios, or records and record players.

⁷⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554.0: The A.B.A. Story 1963), see Chapter 1.

⁸⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554.0: The A.B.A. Story (1963), see Chapters 1 & 4.



Figure 44: A view of the houses in Wittenoom. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 45: Single men's accommodation. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 46: Inside a single man's hut: the bare necessities. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 47: In the single men's compound. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 48: Vines to keep the houses cool. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 49: Italian miners with shaven heads. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

After a day's work, many would have a few glasses of beer to stave off the heat. "That was when you were single," Giacomo Bevacqua explained.⁸¹ Then they had lunch or dinner, depending on their shift and went straight to bed. Meals were taken either in the Single Men's mess, the men's hut or in one of the many boarding houses set up by the Italian wives, many of whom acted as surrogate mothers to the single men. The married men went home to their wives and children, where some enjoyed a social drink, rather than frequenting the pub. To make life more bearable for their wives and families, some Italian men made improvements to their rented homes.

Several accounts suggest that Italian men were participating in the celebration of the Catholic mass, as they would have done back in Italy. One of the travelling Catholic priests had learned a Lombard dialect from miners working on the various Western Australian mines. Brothers Giuseppe and Mario Bonomi helped with the collection of money to finance the building of the Catholic Church and then its construction. Giuseppe acted as altar boy during mass, just as he had done during his childhood in Italy. On November 6 1955 the Wittenoom Catholic Church, *Corpus Christi*, was blessed and opened.⁸²

Italian men also joined the town's social committees which organized the various dances and fancy balls: Toni Martino and Umberto Favero both reported being voted best-dressed at those events. The Wittenoom Races, Wittenoom's equivalent to the Melbourne Cup, was a very popular event and mentioned by many participants (see figure 58). The occasion meant a day off for everyone and was enjoyed by all. Even the men made an effort to dress up for the occasion, only to be enveloped in clouds of dust as they participated in the 44 gallon drum asbestos filling competition, in the blistering heat (see figure 57).

The Italians organized their own soccer team, which played the "rest of the world" team (see figures 59 & 60). Competition was keen and the game was enjoyed by all who attended at the town's sports field. Hunting was also a popular pastime among the Italian men. Donning their Italian berets and armed with shot guns the men brought home emu, kangaroo and birds (see figures 61 & 62). Not familiar with Australian birds, they often shot

⁸¹ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

⁸² Email from Sister Frances Stibi (Presentation sister), archivist for the Catholic Archdiocese, Perth, 24 March 2011.

those less than palatable, and then had to throw them away. They also provided the townspeople with fresh meat courtesy of the roaming cattle from the local stations, shot illegally. To keep the policeman quiet, he was given the first share. In the early days, the meat was then quickly divided up as there was no large refrigeration storage.

To handle the heat, apart from drinking, the young men went for a swim at the local swimming holes. As cars became more common, friends crowded into them to picnic as far away as Port Hedland, or at one of the several gorges which dot the Hamersley Ranges. The stories, some illustrated by the photographs of Toni Ranieri, suggest that drinking and gambling were common pastimes and a problem in the town, among both the single and married men. The police station had frequent visitors needing to sober up. Several participants revealed that, as young men in the town, much of their hard earned money went on beer to stave off the heat. Arturo Della Maddalena remembered that the alcohol in the town cost three times what you paid in Perth, but they all still drank.

Some men lived from pay packet to pay packet. Pio Panizza recalled: “[a man] would get to Saturday that he was in debt from the Saturday before... Friday night they gave you your pay... He had a debt for the following week”.⁸³ Drinking led to fighting among the men; often over one of the few single women in the town. Giulio Santini recalled:

There used to be a lot of booze around... We were about five hundred young blokes there... and there were few ladies.....So it used to be a bit of jealousy.⁸⁴

Racism directed against the Aborigines was also a problem, fuelled by the drinking and jealousy, as they too courted the women at the Wednesday and Friday night dances. On at least one occasion this rivalry triggered a brawl. There was also one account which mentioned the presence of prostitution in the town.

⁸³ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

⁸⁴ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 50: Enjoying a drink at the Fortescue Hotel. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 51: Keeping cool. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 52: Swimming in one of the local gorges. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 53: Doing the washing. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 54: Wittenoom: The Wild West. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 55: Making their own music. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 56: The Hamersley Ranges come alive with the sound of music. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 57: The asbestos tailings competition at the Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 58: The Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.

To pass the time, many Italians played a friendly game of cards, as they would have done among friends in their village bar in Italy. Many, nonetheless, participated in the gambling school (see figure 63). Those men who focused on their financial goals remained well clear of these activities; but even they sometimes relented, joining in the gambling at someone else's insistence, and invariably losing. Attilio Micheloni did not get involved in the serious gambling, preferring the friendly and traditional Italian card games of *scopa* or *briscola* with his friends. He witnessed the impact of the losses.

I saw people, Italians, crying... Two from the Veneto, "I have a wife and kids in Italy"!!!! If you've got wife and kids in Italy, why are you going to gamble? He was crying because he had lost all his pay. But I never gambled.⁸⁵

Two-Up was also popular, as was betting on the horses and cock fights. The stakes were high, with thousands of pounds wagered on horses in the Eastern States with the town's bookmaker. The card games and Two-Up lasted hours, with many taking a *sickie* to participate. As early as 1949 and again in the 1960s, the town's policemen had attempted to put an end to the gambling.⁸⁶ Umberto Favero, who had arrived in Wittenoom in 1961, explained:

Well, it wasn't legal. The policeman did not want to close his eyes to it. The new man said: "No more!" and it ended... Sometimes, they went out in the bush, 20 or 30 people. They played there, but no one knew.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Interview with Attilio Micheloni, Italy, November 2008.

⁸⁶ Motley Rice document, Plaintiff's exhibit no. 10151: 9 June 1949, Australian Workers Hearing, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Interview by phone with Umberto Favero, Perth, February 2009.



Figure 59: The Italian soccer team. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.



Figure 60: The "Rest of the World" soccer team at Wittenoom. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 61: Off for the hunt. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 62: A successful catch. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

It was all in the hope of winning the *pot*, containing hundreds and often thousands of pounds — a desperate man's potential early ticket out of Wittenoom. The president of the Asbestos Diseases Society, Robert Vojakovic, who worked in Wittenoom as a very young man, walked away with the *pot*. Vojakovic's account illustrates what went on in the gambling school:

It was Christmas Eve, I only had eight pound [\$16] on me. It was all the dough I had in three months... They took money for the mess. I used to have money for cigarettes... I even had a tab bill with Mario Sterpini and he passed it on [to ABA Limited] to deduct it from my pay. So I got nothing left... after they took my fares off, mattress, blanket, bed... So I came to the main compound where all the ethnics used to play cards... pretty popular game... I never could join because I didn't have enough cash... Christmas Eve... I was very helpful: I was making sandwiches, getting coffee from Mario, getting beer from the hotel... And during the night I was making coffee for the guys from this billy. In the morning we all went to have breakfast. More cards Christmas day. Lunch time back to the mess and we all got a bottle of beer because it was bloody hot! And back to the game and they felt sorry for me, you see. The guys thought I was wonderful. I used to get them cigarettes, coffee... make sure that tins were empty... they used for cigarette ashtrays... They said, well, how much money you got? I told them only eight pounds. They said... come in... because I couldn't go in the school... unless you had forty or fifty pounds [\$80 or \$100] — the entry fee... They said, "Let him in! Let him lose his money!" I got in and I just couldn't lose. We played all night Christmas night... We played all day Boxing Day... and... all night Boxing Day... In the early morning I woke up with all the money in my pocket. Most people owing me money — hundred pound here, fifty, thirty... One...tall bloke... totally broke owed me... more than a hundred himself... He said, "Hey, you lads! Leave him alone! You lost the money! You owe him money! Just let him go to sleep! Get lost! Cut your losses"!!... Most of the words I didn't understand but I understand they're not going to rob me... (Angela: How much did you win?) Five hundred and fifty pounds [\$1,100] plus what they owed me... I was only 21... The bloke came from MMA...MacRobertson Airlines... I said to him: "What's the chance of me going to Perth"? "None whatsoever! Leave me alone!"... When he came back I put five ten pound [\$20] notes on the table. I said, "Here are the bricks"! It was slang in those days. "It's all yours if I get a ticket to Perth." So he snatched the money and he said, "Every chance! I'll let you know". So that was the end of Wittenoom for me.⁸⁸

Giulio Santini was not a gambler but recalls witnessing such events.

I knew people who came to Wittenoom Gorge on Friday night... went to the Two-Up... won three thousand pounds [\$6,000]... at the time... On Monday morning they got a plane and went back in Italy... because they came from Italy straight down here [Wittenoom].⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Interview with Robert Vojakovic, Perth, December 2010.

⁸⁹ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 63: All dressed up for a game of TwoUp. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

Reasons to Leave and Stay

If you did not succumb to the drinking or become embroiled in the gambling, Wittenoom was a place for making money and then moving on. For many the unacceptable working conditions and the heat and the dust prompted many early departures, even if they had to repay their air fare.

Accidents also triggered departures. In 1952 Ezio Belintende left after only a month in the mine, as a result of an injury sustained from a fall. Pio Panizza suffered an eye injury and left about nine months after his arrival in 1959. Mario Bonomi left with his family in 1961, nearly ten years after his arrival; a cave-in left him with serious back injuries, which required a year's hospitalization in Perth. Vincenzo Ubaldi left with his brother, after six months. His brother had also been involved in a mine accident.

Once most people had sufficient savings to purchase a house, a business or for the fare to return to Italy they too would leave, fed up with life in the isolated town. Gino Selle's wife was displeased with him because he allowed gambling to take place in their home. She insisted on their leaving. Before repatriating to Italy, this adventurous Italian couple and their Australian-born daughters spent six months travelling in a camper van to see more of Australia. They drove along the north of the country and then headed down the east coast. Before finally heading for Sydney where they boarded a ship back to Italy in 1964, the family spent two months in Canberra, where Selle worked as a carpenter on the construction of the Australian Mint.

By the late 1950s Italians, along with other migrant workers, had started to leave because they were being diagnosed with the onset of asbestosis or pneumoconiosis. Giuseppe Bonomi and Bruno Giannasi were among those who had developed asbestosis, with varying degrees of diminished lung capacity.⁹⁰ The closure of the mine in December 1966 pre-empted the departures of most of the remaining Italians.⁹¹ The Martino family left in 1967 to give their children better educational opportunities back in Perth. By then all but two Italian families had departed: the Sterpini family and one couple, Venera Uculano and Umberto Favero. Mario Sterpini and his family would continue to run the General Store until the 1980s. Mario Sterpini left in 1978, due to illness; the rest of his family followed in 1984. Umberto Favero would work in other mining ventures before going on to manage a surveying gang for mining magnate, Lang Hancock, until his permanent departure in 2002.

Conclusion

The attraction of high earnings enticed 7,000 workers to the Wittenoom asbestos mine during its 23 years of operation. More than half the workers, unable to tolerate the living and

⁹⁰ See Chapter 8.

⁹¹ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Department of Labour and National Service, Western Australia, File no. 65/1153 – Industrial Conditions Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Ltd. Wittenoom. The ABA Ltd housing list on March 6, 1966 reveals 18 families listed of Italian origin. This does not include the single men who lived in the single men's quarters or were boarding, with families. Antonio Casella, Arturo Della Maddalena and Vincenzo Ubaldi were among them. Umberto Favero and Venera Uculano do not figure in the lists, most likely they were living in the settlement, where ABA Ltd employees lived. Uculano was secretary to the mine manager.

working conditions, left before they could reach their financial goal. It was only through considerable effort and sacrifices and several years of backbreaking work that those high earnings could be achieved.

Most of the first group of experienced Italian miners who arrived in 1951 spent little time there in the face of working and living conditions more primitive than anything they had previously encountered. A comparison of the employment contract and the accounts of several of the early Italian arrivals suggest that the company misinformed these workers about the conditions. Others despite being made aware of the difficult conditions continued to arrive. Only the most determined tolerated the conditions.

Italians with accompanying families had no option but to stay longer. The high cost of living in Wittenoom coupled with the need to repay debts incurred to move there meant it took longer to save for their goal of *sistemazione*. Those families made the sacrifices necessary to buy a house, farm or business in Perth or upon their return to Italy. Those without families knew that the high wages on offer would allow them after two or three years of hard work to achieve similar goals. Many of the men (single and married) nonetheless turned to drinking and gambling to counter the isolation, the working conditions and the heat; they may have been the reason some took their own life. The gambling losses many incurred and heavy drinking served only to prolong their stay. To withstand the conditions, many of the young single Italian men and families found ways to entertain themselves; many activities were reminiscent of their lives in Italy.

All but a handful of the 1,102 Italian workers and their families moved on because the *sistemazione* they desired could not be achieved in Wittenoom. Once Italians had had enough of the conditions, had saved enough, were diagnosed with the early symptoms of asbestos-related disease or had been involved in a mining accident they settled elsewhere in Western Australia or repatriated to Italy. The company never mentioned asbestos-related diseases. Because of the transient nature of the Wittenoom population most ex-workers would only become aware of them as reports of disease emerged years later.

Chapter Five - The Italian Women: “We Did It Because We Had To”¹

In the early 1990s, as my father’s dementia was becoming more pronounced, my mother was asked by a nurse: “Why don’t you just put him in a nursing home?” My mother’s response, in her limited English, put the nurse back in her place: “I married him in sickness and in health”. The response said a great deal about my mother’s values: life was about family and commitment, no matter what cards she had been dealt. Italian women who stayed for extended periods in Wittenoom during the 1950s and 1960s — whether from the north, centre or south of Italy — had been raised similarly to ‘serve’ their men. It is a deeply-ingrained principle by which they lived and to which the surviving women still adhere today.²

This chapter is informed by the stories of nine women: eight wives of Wittenoom workers and the daughter of the late Nelda Caffieri, Maria Detoni, who lived in Wittenoom until she was 18 years of age. The shortest stay, reported among the female participants, was a predetermined six months, the longest nearly 40 years. These women were eager to share their stories with me, and they often contained more detail than the men’s. In the telling of these particular stories, there was neither a sense of rancour nor embellishment. Rather the women focused on the need to be with their husbands and to make a better future for their families, despite the difficult conditions under which they lived. There may be other women, with whom I have not spoken, nonetheless, who might have had a different tale to tell as residents in the town. In several cases Wittenoom became the means to reunite families. The women’s narratives describe their daily activities, their adaptation to the harsh environment, the social life and accounts of their husbands’ and boarders’ experiences in the mine and the mill. Their photographs record the fashion of the 1950s and 1960s, social occasions, the men’s work environment, improvements made to rental houses, their places of employment, children’s activities, and the re-establishment of religious rituals. Many used

¹ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.

² Woods, T., (1977), 'Old Habits Died Hard in the New Country', *The West Australian*, 9 December. In this newspaper article Venera Uculano’s mother, Michelangela is interviewed about her life in Sicily, which revealed that “After two or three years of schooling, Sicilian girls were kept home to work in the kitchen and garden, preparing food for the men who worked out on the small farms.” This idea of serving (meeting the needs of) their men was a common element in the storytelling of the women, no matter their provenance in Italy. In this chapter, the women allude to this expectation in their stories.

the expression, or their stories illustrate the notion of '*l'arte di arrangiarsi*' — the art of getting by or making do.

The women's presence injected a sense of normality into the social life at Wittenoom. To some extent, they tempered behaviour in an otherwise male environment, where drink and gambling nonetheless continued. As with the men, the women made friendships within and across their Italian regional boundaries and with men and women of other nationalities. The women contributed to and enjoyed the growing sense of community in the town as their residency turned from months into years. The isolation had drawn them together, dispelling the mistrust they, like the men, may have quietly harboured towards others. Mention of asbestos and its health risks brought forth responses from the women similar to the men's: they would never have raised children in Wittenoom, or gone there themselves, had they known.

The women had come from Lombardy, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Trentino Alto-Adige, Veneto, Tuscany, Molise, Sicily, while one was the child of an Italian immigrant mother whose family had gone to Egypt during Italy's early 20th century policy of demographic expansion.³ Two of these nine women eventually repatriated to Italy with their husbands and Australian-born children; the other six settled with their families in and around Perth. Venera Uculano, one of the few remaining Wittenoom residents after the town's closure, left permanently in 2002, returning to Perth.⁴

Adapting to the Unfamiliar

In 1950 the first of the Italian women, Displaced Persons of World War 2, had arrived in the town with their families. The unfamiliar way of life they found left them, and the Italian women who followed, with no choice but to adapt, if their families were to stay united and they were to achieve *sistemazione*. The women's first impressions of Wittenoom are similar to the

³ At the time the Italian government was encouraging emigration in the name of 'colonial expansion'. For a discussion of Italy's late 19th and early 20th century policy of colonialism see Choate, M. I. (2003), 'From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again: The Politics of Italy's Demographic Expansion, 1890-1912', *Modern Italy: Journal of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy*, 8 (1), pp. 65-75.

⁴ There were still a handful of residents in Wittenoom during my visit in September 2010. I met two who had moved there long after its closure. They informed me that two others were about to settle in the town.

men's, but tend to contain more detail about the landscape, climate, living conditions and their adaptation, or otherwise.

The plane trip to the mining town was their first, for most of the women. In 1953, after her arrival on the ship *Surriento*, Cecilia Bonomi had stayed overnight in Perth, at lodgings in Beaufort Street run by Gianfranco Merizzi's mother-in-law.⁵ The next day, she left for Wittenoom to be reunited with her husband, Mario Bonomi. He had gone to Wittenoom the previous year encouraged by his brother's account of the potential earnings. Cecilia had met Mario Bonomi in Switzerland where both had been working. She had married him by proxy in Italy; but they would celebrate their marriage a second time after her arrival in Wittenoom.⁶ Her brief account of the plane trip to Wittenoom, unlike the men's accounts in the previous chapter, voiced the fear those early first-time plane travellers must have experienced: "The plane trip *e` stato* [was] alright and if I go, they'll go too! *Bisogna pensar cosi*" [You have to think like that].

The conditions in which the women were expected to live yielded reactions of shock, tears and homesickness for the life they had left behind in Italy or in Perth. Many were, nevertheless, determined to make the best of the situation for the anticipated longer term benefits. The women's stay was made bearable by the presence of their family and friends; although several accounts include references to other women who had found the life intolerable and left their husbands to work alone while they went back to Perth or Italy.

Importantly for the Italian women, going to Wittenoom allowed them to keep their families together or reunite them. Lina Tagliaferri (and her 15 month old daughter) arrived in Wittenoom via Darwin, in October of 1951, to be reunited with her husband, Beppe, who had left for Wittenoom nine months earlier. They had travelled for four days by plane from Rome. Her husband collected them at Wittenoom airport and took them to a new asbestos house, lined with wallboard and timber. She was struck by the Wittenoom landscape, which bore no

⁵ Interview with Mrs Sara Merizzi and Mrs Rina Tomei, Perth, December 2010. Sara Merizzi is the wife of the late Gianfranco Merizzi, himself a migrant. He is still a household name in Perth to this day, acknowledged for the help he provided to Italian immigrants arriving in Western Australia after World War 2.

⁶ Iuliano, *Op Cit.* p. 89. Marriage by proxy — *matrimoni per procura* — was a practice which ensured arranged marriages were carried through in the absence of the groom. The 'proxy' or stand-in was usually a relative of the groom who was registering the consent of the missing partner to the marriage.

similarities to the mountainous region of Lombardy where she lived. The valleys there were dotted with villages and houses of stone or local timber, whereas as Lina explained:

In front of me was a desert full of Spinifex. Our home was the first one in that row. There was a bit of road of red earth and then there was all Spinifex. It seemed like a wheat field to look at, but it was all Spinifex.⁷

She awoke the first morning to the vagaries of the insidious red earth; it covered her beautiful white bed linen. The wind had blown it in through the open door during the first hot October night she experienced there. After her husband's departure for work, she stripped the beds, washed the mattresses and boiled the linen in the copper. She then set about mending her husband's torn shirts. The sun was so hot that everything dried very quickly. Despite what must have been a very trying time, Lina's humour shone through as she recounted an occasion when grasshoppers had invaded her house: "*Era un concerto! Un vero concerto!*"⁸ She sprayed them with DDT and then washed everything down. Apart from the chirruping grasshoppers, only the sound of the DC3 plane, arriving every two or three days with new workers, interrupted the quiet of the town. She would adapt to her new life, despite its many challenges, grateful to have her family reunited.

Cecilia Bonomi's and Lea Guagnin's accounts were of acquiescence to a life which was beyond the migrant women's control. By the mid 1950s the houses had begun to show signs of neglect. Lea Guagnin's account of their rented house explains her comment: "It is not a place I would like to go again... You don't need to use the door". Her family's first night in Wittenoom, in 1957, is still a vivid memory. As Lea continued, she emphasized the word "*dirty*".

The day we arrived in Wittenoom... They took us to this dirty home... There was neither a bed.....nor a saucepan... *abbiamo dormito la prima notte per terra*⁹. We had a quilt with us... we put it on the floor and the three of us.....Fulvia, Egizio and I slept on the floor.¹⁰

She described the wilfulness of some departing occupants.

⁷ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁸ It was a concert! A real concert!

⁹ We slept on the floor that first night.

¹⁰ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, November 2010.

You know people are very nasty sometimes... In Wittenoom... they make a lot of money but before they go they break the wall... they make things on the floor.

Like most who went to Wittenoom, economic necessity had dictated the Guagnins' decision to go there; otherwise, the family would never have stayed. With noticeable emphasis on the word "*never*" Lea explained:

I never been in such a position in my life!... I didn't say anything... only tears was coming down like this (she points to her eyes)... My husband console me, but he too was upset... We did it because we had to.¹¹

Names mentioned on more than one occasion during my fieldwork were those of Mrs Nelda Caffieri from Rio Marina, on the Island of Elba, and Mrs Panizza and Mrs Mosconi from the Trentino Alto Adige region. Nelda Caffieri, her husband, Romelio, and their two children, Giovanni and Maria, arrived in Wittenoom in May 1951. Nelda's husband and her brother, Lazzarino Tamagni, had been recruited by ABA Limited's Wittenoom mine manager during his trip to Italy earlier in 1951. Both men had spent their lives working as coal miners, while Nelda sold coal from the front room of the family's house.¹² The women from Trentino Alto Adige began to arrive around this same period to join their husbands, who had also been recruited by ABA Limited.¹³ Nelda's daughter, Maria, recalled that her mother and the women from the Trentino Alto Adige cried for many days after their arrival, distraught at what they had found. As they adapted, these women would offer solace and help to many other Italian women who came after them. Lea Guagnin recalled the Caffieris' help upon her family's arrival in 1957:

The Caffieris... they lend us a couple of bed... and we put some.....doona on the floor.....and then my husband went... he was coming back from work.....he was to bringing the ammunition box that were wood... and they put one close to the other until I made a bed.¹⁴

For Cecilia Bonomi, having to adapt was not new. By then in her early twenties, Wittenoom was just another piece of her migration jigsaw, in an attempt to achieve *sistemazione* and importantly, to rejoin her husband.

¹¹ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.

¹² Interview with Maria Detoni and Nadia Delaurentis, Perth, December 2010.

¹³ Hills, Op Cit. See Chapter 4.

¹⁴ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.

[It was] another world (a tone of resignation) but what can you do? After you get used to it... I'd already seen a bit... I was born in France.....grown in France.....returned to Italy with my parents.....in '35... after.....I went to school in Italy.....Then when the war had finished we started to travel, to go and look for work in other countries... and so I also went to Switzerland [for work]... Mario, my husband,.....He took me to our place [in Wittenoom].....*Ti porto nella villa adesso che ho pitturato io!!! La baracca era sua.....baracca.*¹⁵

Cecilia is philosophical about the *baracca* in which she had to live:

Ehi... well, they [the houses] were all the same. *Bisogna dire.....non sono solo io.....Siamo tutti uguali.....e allora bisogna rassegnarsi.....dopo avevo mio marito che mi voleva bene e.....what I worrying about? Una casa.....una casa se ne fanno ancora.*¹⁶

Nazzarena Mirandola and her two daughters arrived in Wittenoom in 1962, a few months after her husband, Gino Selle. She had had to finalize the sale of their Morley Park home in Perth, where they had lived for four years (see figure 64). Her husband had rented what Nazzarena described as a big house with four or five rooms. In contrast to Cecilia Bonomi's summation of the home her husband had prepared Nazzarena's focus differed, she explained that they were "long houses... also with cooling... It was hot... In any case, the house wasn't bad". It was the town of Wittenoom, on the other hand, which was a shock for Nazzarena. She equated Wittenoom to being like "*il Wild West... fuori dal mondo*".¹⁷ The climate was unbearable: two months of the year it rained and the humidity it created was "*una cosa pazzesca*".¹⁸ Even now fifty years later, she recalled that it was always hot.

¹⁵ This was said mostly in Italian. I translated all but the last section: "I'll take you to the home I have painted.....The shed was his.....shed." Her husband had used the word '*villa*' to describe their home. In Italian "*villa*" refers to a freestanding dwelling. Cecilia conveys her feelings regarding the '*villa*' by her use of the word "*baracca*" — *shed*. Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

¹⁶ I have to say that it wasn't only me. So you have to get over it. I had my husband who loved me...You can always create another home. Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

¹⁷ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Roverchiara, Italy, November 2008. It was a bit like the Wild West...out of this world.

¹⁸ Just crazy



Figure 64: Nazzarena Mirandola and her daughters at Morley Park, c. 1962. Photo courtesy Nazzarena Mirandola.

The emotional reactions of many of the women were due to the environment. The heat, the boiling tap water, the willi willi winds, the hot nights, the cyclones and flooding during the wet season, the miles of Spinifex, the flies and other insects, the blue haze created by the asbestos, the stray cattle, the kangaroos and emus, the snakes and racehorse goannas and the red dust were variously mentioned in the women's stories. After the initial shock of the accommodation, adapting to the native animals was another concern for some. Gina Martino spoke of her fear of her uninvited tenant, a racehorse goanna, which had moved in under the Martino's house. Yet one reason to welcome the goanna's presence was its preference for the snakes, kangaroos, emus and dingoes as well as insects. Goannas have no appetite for humans!

Venera Uculano, unlike most of the Italian women, loved the outback. It was in 1963 during a nine day holiday to the Pilbara region that she fell in love with the north — a connection she still feels to this day. Venera enjoyed the adventure of travelling on gravel roads (still unsealed in the 1960s, once you ventured beyond Carnarvon) and traversing crossings flooded by the rains. It was a different life to the one she knew as a secretary in Perth. The native animals and the spectacular landscape created a lasting impression. Upon her return, she went to the A.B.A. Limited Office in Perth to apply for a job in Wittenoom. A few months later, in October 1963, she had become A.B.A. Limited's secretary in Wittenoom.

Venera's recollection of Saturday mornings led her also to equate Wittenoom to a Wild West town. In contrast to Nazzarena Mirandola's account, she was awestruck at the spectacle she witnessed during Saturday morning shopping. It was then that people from the surrounding cattle stations came to town. Venera recalled the Aboriginal men who came into town "wearing their bright satin shirts, tight trousers and Williams Cuban heeled shoes. One would think it was America's West. The women were dressed nicely in their bright colours".¹⁹

The outback climate had influenced Venera Uculano's decision to go to Wittenoom. She loved the hot Wittenoom summers, with temperatures reaching between 40 to 45 degrees Celsius. The wet season and the spectacular storms accompanied by the sound of the torrential rains on her corrugated iron roof, she found mesmerizing. Trees were often

¹⁹ A letter I received from Venera Uculano, 8 February 2009.

uprooted during those storms and strong winds. None of the other participants would mention this aspect of the climate. They, instead, focused on the overwhelming heat, which struck most people upon their arrival, as Valentina Giannasi's ill-preparedness for it in 1962 demonstrates:

We took the DC 3 but I didn't know where I was going.....I was well dressed.....I had a woollen suit... because my sister was a dressmaker... and I had a coat and gloves.....black leather.....the bag.....which I still have.....(she laughs) I still have it!.....And we leave [Perth].....Our stuff came by truck.....We had suitcases when we went on the plane which arrives at Geraldton... The heat starts... and the further north we went the hotter it got... We didn't have clothes to change into.²⁰

One of Lea Guagnin's most vivid memories of Wittenoom was that the heat "melted butter in half an hour."²¹ On more than one occasion during our times together, she exclaimed: "The heat! The heat!" It was so hot that when her husband, Egizio was working night shift, she and her daughter Fulvia slept with the door and the windows left open; something she would never do today. Cecilia Bonomi echoed Lea's feelings. "In the beginning it's strange, very strange."²² It was so hot that at night Cecilia wet the sheets to keep cool; only to make her perspire even more. Eventually, she explained, "*e poi un po' alla volta si abitua, no*"²³ Valentina Giannasi adapted too:

(laughing) The heat... slowly, slowly we got used to it... I lived there willingly... There was the shop... the hotel... the church... The children went to school... and we got used to it... Because not all... many cried... The husband would send the wife back because they couldn't tolerate the place... You know... really... the water was good... Then we were young.²⁴

Lea Guagnin's opinion of the water quality differs from Valentina's. "And the water! What a disaster!" Lea tried a variety of soaps without much success, in water she described as salty. After having travelled kilometres from its source, the water was at boiling point when it reached the town, making it impossible to use immediately for bathing or drinking. For bathing the water was collected in the bath tub, and left until it reached a tolerable temperature. It amused Lina Tagliaferri now as she recalled that the already hot water meant

²⁰ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

²¹ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.

²² Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, Perth, October 2009.

²³ And then a little at a time, you get used to it.

²⁴ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

it took much less time to cook spaghetti. As drinking water, it was another matter. Cecilia Bonomi put the water in the fridge to cool down, while Lina Tagliaferri had canvas bags to which a pipe was attached for decanting. She wet the bag which the air cooled, making the water cold enough to drink. Lina had two of these canvas bags hung on opposite sides of her house. In the morning they used the one on the shady side of the house, and the other in the afternoon, when the sun had moved.

Keeping cool required some ingenuity. Residents employed practical solutions to insulate the houses from the harshness of the sun and to lower the internal temperature. Verandas were covered with chicken wire, on which vines were then trained. A sprinkler placed on top of the roof trickled water over the vines lowering the temperature; when the winds blew a similar effect was achieved. Cecilia Bonomi recalled their Coolgardie Safe was the only efficient way to keep their house cool. A.B.A Limited used the same Spinifex cooler in the hot, old corrugated iron building where Venera Uculano worked. She also had one at home, on which she placed vegetables to keep cool. The cooler's only drawback was its inability to regulate the temperature. Venera remembers turning it on before going to the movies and returning to a freezing cold house!

Unlike Venera's love for life in the outback, most of the women stayed because of their economic circumstances; they had no choice but to make do.

Arrangiarsi²⁵

Such was the harshness of the environment compounded by the isolation that the philosophical approach of the women was one of *arrangiarsi*. Many Italian families would achieve their financial goals and *sistemazione* because of the women's ability to be frugal, an integral aspect of the concept of *arrangiarsi*. They just got on with what had to be done to attain their goals. Lina Tagliaferri recalled her husband's words:

"You must not go out to work. Don't throw our money away without knowing where it is going. What I earn has to be enough". That's what he used to say to me: "Don't throw it [money] away!"²⁶

²⁵ The art of getting by, ingenuity, getting on with it, making do.

²⁶ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

As some Italian families stayed in Wittenoom for longer periods than first planned, they found ways to economise, despite the high cost of living in the isolated town. Lina recalled: “*E` passato un anno, passati due, tre e si comincia ad abituarsi e si sta là*”.²⁷ Her family lived frugally, in the knowledge that their savings would eventually bring about a better *sistemazione* elsewhere. With their departure from Wittenoom in the late 1950s, they had a fully paid off comfortable home, not far from the city of Perth. Lina explained their strategy:

If you were trying to save, you could not go to the store to buy everything. What you wanted was not always there, in any case. Often people leaving would sell items. It was common to go to see if anything was suitable and buy it. But it was all other people's stuff.²⁸

Since Lina had travelled from Italy to Wittenoom by plane, she had been limited in what she could bring. She had arrived with only 30 kilos of luggage. She did not have saucepans, and at the time of her arrival in 1951, neither did Wittenoom's General Store. Lina and her husband *si sono arrangiati* — they made do. To cook spaghetti her husband had taken an empty pickled vegetables' tin, turned down the sides and added a handle. Subsequently, they would buy some second hand aluminium saucepans and yellow Johnson plates (see figure 65). Her husband also salvaged two badly burned saucepans from the Wittenoom tip. Lina scrubbed them till they shone like new (see figure 66). “I still have them. I polished them for weeks and weeks till they were clean again”, she said proudly. “You need water and soap, but you also need *l'olio di gomito*’...*l'olio di gomito!!!!*”²⁹ Lina's sister-in-law had instead sent away to a Perth store for saucepans. The store sent an enamelled set, which rusted once they had become chipped. Lina commented, “They would send us stuff that they couldn't sell”!

With only basic refrigeration available, storing food and vegetables was a constant challenge in the heat. Despite the availability of refrigerators for purchase from Wittenoom's General Store, the cheaper alternatives, kerosene fridges or the Coolgardie safe were used to store perishables. Lina Tagliaferri recalled that the kerosene fridge let off unpleasant fumes and required regular cleaning. The fruit and vegetables arrived by two means: a

²⁷ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008. A year passed, then two, three and then you start to get used to it and you stay there.

²⁸ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

²⁹ Elbow grease...elbow grease!!!! Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

monthly delivery by ship to Roebourne and then a three hour drive to the town and with the weekly truck deliveries by road from Perth. Potatoes, onions and fruit, mainly oranges and Granny Smith apples, arrived once a month by ship.³⁰ Residents were allowed a dozen oranges and two pounds [.9 of a kilogram] of apples and similar amounts of potatoes and onions. If on the second day there were still supplies the townspeople were allowed to buy further provisions. At her husband's suggestion, Lina used to return to the General Store for two or three days to purchase more, if produce was still available, in order to secure sufficient supplies in the intervening period between deliveries. This was particularly necessary in the wet season when truck deliveries stopped because of the flooded roads.

After explaining her purchasing and storing routine, Lina pronounced the dictum which underpinned the survival of many Italian families in the inhospitable climate, or for any other challenge which presented itself: "*bisognava arrangiarsi in qualunque sia maniera*"³¹ There were things, nevertheless, on which they would not compromise, such as the purchase of meat. Lina's husband had worked as a butcher in Italy and Switzerland and recognized a good cut of meat. Lina referred to the butcher who tried to sell the poorer quality cuts of meat to the Italians: a situation which created some tension until the butcher realized he could not deceive them. Both Lina Tagliaferri and Cecilia Bonomi persisted until they were sold good quality meat: when they asked for a specific cut of meat, the butcher gave it to them.

Jobs for the Women

To earn extra money and defray the high cost of living in Wittenoom, all but two of the Italian female participants worked for pay in or outside the home. These women made mention of other Italian women who also engaged in paid work. The experience of these women mirrored that of the significant number of Italian migrant women in Australian urban areas (62 per cent in 1954 and 55 per cent in 1966) who worked for wages to achieve home ownership and economic security for the family.³²

³⁰ This same ship then loaded up with the asbestos bags for its return voyage to Fremantle.

³¹ You had to get by in whatever way possible!

³² Vasta, E., (1992), 'Italian Migrant Women', in Castles, S., et al. (eds.), *Australia's Italians: culture and community in a changing society*; (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin), p. 149. See also Miller, P.



Figure 65: Lina Tagliaferri's Johnson plates. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.



Figure 66: The saucepans from the Wittenoom tip. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.

(2011), *Calculating Babies: Changing Accounts of Fertility Decisions among Italians in Melbourne, Australia in Intimacy and Italian Migration: Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*. Baldassar, L. & Gabaccia, D. R. (Fordham University Press), p. 94.

The 1971 census revealed that this continued to be the case for 64 per cent of Italian women who had immigrated in the preceding five years.³³ By this time Italian women in cities and regional centres around Australia worked in factories engaged in clothing manufacture, on assembly lines of various manufacturing industries or in food processing plants.³⁴ This was in contrast to Australian women of the 1950s and 1960s who after marrying tended to stay home to look after the family, as was the expectation in that period.³⁵

Seven of the 10 female participants and from among the women mentioned in this research had children and so set up boarding houses. Others found work in the Wittenoom hospital, the General Store, the Single Men's mess or Mario Sterpini's Italian bar. None of the women involved in this research mentioned working in ABA Limited's sack making factory. The factory's workforce consisted of four women: two sewing, one cutting and one branding the hessian sacks to prepare them for transporting the asbestos. Each machinist was capable of producing 1,000 sacks per day. They carried out their work on a contract basis of 1 ¼ pence (approximately one cent) per sack or at the basic wage, whichever was greater.³⁶

Rosa Tamburri had been married 11 months when she went to Wittenoom. She had had to convince her husband to allow her to join him. Rosa went with the intention to work. As Rosa said, "That's what you go up for!" The condition of the house in which she, her husband and five other family members were living "was not the best", she explained (see figure 67). She could not have imagined staying in it all day. In any case, life in Wittenoom was very expensive. Just as the men were motivated by the higher earnings so too were the women. Rosa Tamburri compared her Perth and Wittenoom wages:

Down [in Perth] I was getting £5 [\$10] a week.....Up there I was getting £21 [\$42].....a week... That was at the hospital... With Sterpini I was getting a bit more because we used to do a bit of shift work... I used to get £45 [\$90] a fortnight.³⁷

³³ Panucci, F., Kelly, B., & Casltes, S. (1992), 'Italians help build Australia', in Castles, S. et al. (eds.), *Australia's Italians: culture and community in a changing society*, North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 61.

³⁴ Vasta, Op Cit. p. 150.

³⁵ Miller (2011), Op Cit. p. 86.

³⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 8.

³⁷ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

At the hospital Rosa worked firstly in the laundry and later as a cleaner in the wards. In Sterpini's bar, frequented by many young Italian men as well as those of other nationalities, she sold coffee and ice-cream, among other snacks (see figure 68). Rosa mentioned unwanted advances from her employer, which only stopped with her threat to tell his wife. When Rosa's unmarried sister, Julie, arrived in Wittenoom, she found work in the Single Men's mess, as did Gina Martino.

Gina and Tony Martino arrived in Wittenoom in 1963 with their five children.³⁸ They shared the responsibility of raising their children so that Gina could do shift work. Her first job was in Sterpini's bar, but she eventually worked in the mess run by Giacomo and Lidia Bevacqua, who employed several Italian women. Gina explained their duties:

In the mess you don't waitress because you don't go in the dining room. It's all men in there... You be too scared to go. We were too young – myself and Lidia, we was not ugly looking woman either.

Tony: some hungry men who couldn't wait to grab her! (Playfully). Always look!

Gina: There was a window... myself was in the kitchen helping... Giannina Verini used to help Giacomo to cook... Giacomo was the main cook... We used to prepare the dishes...on the bench and Lidia pass them out [to the men]. We don't go in the dining room. We only go after everybody go to collect and bring them to dishwasher.³⁹

For the women who ran boarding houses, their lives revolved around their domestic duties. They prepared meals for the shift workers or the men's crib (lunch); did their family's and often their boarders' washing; kept the house clean; looked after their children and attended to the shopping locally and via catalogue orders to Perth. For genuine Italian foodstuffs, they shopped at the *Re Store* in Northbridge and at *Bairds* for clothing and better quality household items, not available at Wittenoom's General Store. Another of their tasks was to mend the men's clothes which were torn as they brushed against the low-hanging, jagged roof in the mine's stopes. Nothing was thrown away. Rosa Tamburri summarised the Italian women's daily routine:

Cook for the men.....wash for them.....clean.....[You] up there to work.....The house wasn't the best.....The food wasn't much.....very expensive too.....but like I said

³⁸ Rosemary, Susan, Michael, Julie and Noelle.

³⁹ Interview with Tony & Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

when you with people you love.....you sort of.....settle down.⁴⁰

She explained the women's formidable task of washing their husbands' work clothes:

Friday night they bring their clothes home for us to wash: singlets and tops... Singlets: they were all holey because with the.....you know when you drill.....used to burn.....but their trousers... We used to have a laugh.....Between the asbestos and sweat they used to be standing up. We had to put them in the water first, just to take some [fibre] off. Then we had to boil them for them to wear them again.

The moral support the women afforded their husbands, brothers and boarders cannot be underestimated. With wives and sisters present it was possible for the men to share their anger and frustration. Rosa Tamburri remembered the stress her husband and brother experienced:

They used to come home.....now, we know that stressed.....we know it now.....but those days.....they had the hardest day.....“Oh.....I had the hardest day today.....the swearing down there!”... because the drill.....never used to go straight or something had happened... There always were stories.....[They] come home very upset.⁴¹

Valentina Giannasi recalled her young boarders:

They were young boys... You have met Arturo Della Maddalena? I raised him. 18 years old. I was a mother to him and there was also a Yugoslav. 18 years old.....I called him *Piccio* but I don't know his name. He now lives in the Kalgoorlie area. I went with the social worker from Wittenoom Trust, Judy. She took us to have a bit of a tour to Kalgoorlie. At Wittenoom there was a cousin of this *Piccio*... and she said let's go and visit my cousin. When he saw me, he hugged me. He was crying. “You were a mum to me!” (visibly moved).....He was young. I don't know if he is still alive. I don't know. He was sick. Perhaps I did too much for these men. It's not that you made a great deal by looking after these men but they paid something. With that money they paid me we also ate and my husband's money went in the bank to buy our house. We came down and had a house. At that time, it was two thousand sterling, pounds [\$4,000].

Valentina cooked and washed for a large number of men.

I prepared meals for 12 men. Not all of them slept at our place — there wasn't the space but we had a veranda. We put the beds in a row and these men would sleep there... They were young boys.

⁴⁰ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009. Around the world, where men worked in an asbestos mine or factory, there have been reports of wives developing asbestos-related diseases from being exposed to asbestos as they washed their husband's work clothes.

⁴¹ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 67: Rosa and Mario Tamburri and their other family members at the Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy Rosa Tamburri.



Figure 68: Rosa Tamburri with her brother while working in the Italian bar. Photo courtesy Rosa Tamburri.

She prepared the men's breakfast of coffee, bacon and eggs, as well as their lunch. From Perth, she ordered *salami* and *mortadella* to make their sandwiches and wine and other Italian foods, which the weekly truck delivered. They wanted for nothing. The bakery supplied fresh bread and the General Store was there for any other needs. She cooked a meal at midday for the men who worked afternoon shift and again, in the evening for the others and her family. She described one particularly typical Tuscan meal she prepared (see figure 69):

I would cook the way I had always cooked in Italy....I wouldn't make '*pasta al forno*⁴² because in Tuscany it isn't done.....I used to make broth. I even made them the *tortellini*⁴³... even at Wittenoom... with meat... I had the machine... I had brought it from Italy... They had never eaten them.⁴⁴

Then she washed and ironed. The men's clothing came back thick with asbestos, which she first of all soaked in the copper. With no washing machine, she then used two troughs to wash their clothes. There was never much time to relax. She was either doing washing and cooking for the men or looking after her children. Occasionally, the family did go out. These were occasions which Valentina relished (see figure 70).

Nazzarena Mirandola also established a boarding house because she wanted to stay home with her daughters (see figures 71 - 73). Her husband earned good money as a carpenter, but having boarders helped them to save more money, and since she was already cooking, it seemed like a good idea. She had seven men boarding in her home. Some were married men with a family back in Italy, others were single. They came from all over Italy: Sicily, Abruzzo, Calabria and the Valtellina area. During our conversation, she remembered one of the younger single men, Angelo. He helped her a great deal and her daughters became attached to him. Other families recounted similar experiences where boarders played a role in caring for the children. Several of the children, now adults, still recall their boarders' generosity. Nazzarena's boarders had all come to make money, because, especially in the south of Italy, there was no available work, she told me. During the day, she cooked for them, made their beds, washed and ironed their clothes. At that time, Nazzarena

⁴² This dish is more commonly known as lasagne or lasagna.

⁴³ These are made with pasta which is cut into crescent shapes, folded over a filling of meat and then boiled and eaten with a broth or a tomato sauce.

⁴⁴ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

owned one of the first washing machines at Wittenoom. To supplement the food available at the store, her boarders went hunting for kangaroo and wandering cattle from the local stations. By the 1960s some families, including Nazzarena's, had acquired a freezer to store their kill.

When there was time, the women, irrespective of their nationality, met and formed friendships. The stories of Lina Tagliaferri, Cecilia Bonomi (until she set up her own boarding house), Lea Guagnin and Nazzarena Mirandola illustrate how the women spent their free time. With the arrival of Cecilia Bonomi from Italy in 1953, she and Lina Tagliaferri kept each other company. Their conversation centred round their lives before coming to Australia and about this new country, Australia. Their thinking reflected the expectation placed upon women of their generation. "*Così ormai sono qua i nostri mariti. Dobbiamo stare anche noi. La vita è così. Siamo sposati.*"⁴⁵ Lea Guagnin and her four year old daughter spent time with neighbours. One popular topic of conversation for the women was dressmaking. Lea's daughter was always beautifully dressed, as was Lea, because Lea's mother and sister, living in Perth, sewed their clothes. The ladies, upon seeing Fulvia's lovely dresses, thought that Lea could sew and asked if she would sew for them. "I told them that I could sew [long pause]... a button!" (see figures 74 & 75).⁴⁶ Nazzarena Mirandola mentioned her love of sewing. In her spare time, she sewed her family's clothes.

In contrast to the other Italian women who came to join their husbands or other family, Venera Uculano had come to Wittenoom unaccompanied. In addition to her day job, Venera did volunteer work with the Country Women's Association and the Good Neighbour Council. She organized the translation of information posters in the main languages spoken in Wittenoom and between 1963 and 1966 taught English to new arrivals. She was also the initiator of many of the social activities.

⁴⁵ Our husbands are here. We have to live here too. Life is like this now. We are married. Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

⁴⁶ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 69: Bruno Giannasi and two boarders enjoying one of Valentina's meals. Photo courtesy Lidia Nellini.



Figure 70: Bruno & Valentina Giannasi with their boarder, Arturo Della Maddalena at a Wittenoom gathering. Photo courtesy Lidia Nellini.



Figure 71: Nazzarena, husband, Gino Selle and daughters Katia & Carla c. 1964. Photo courtesy Nazzarena Mirandola.



Figure 72: Nazzarena & her daughters, 15th August 1962 at Wittenoorn. Photo courtesy Nazzarena Mirandola.



Figure 73: Nazzarena, Gino & their daughters somewhere in outback Australia c. 1964. Photo courtesy Nazzarena Mirandola.

The women's arrival in the town had prompted a social life centred on dances and get togethers. Their presence to a degree discouraged or, at least, provided an alternative to the gambling and drinking. Gradually they integrated elements from their former lives in Italy, suggesting they desired and needed to add a sense of normality to their current circumstances.

Attempts at Normality

The presence of families injected a sense of normality into the previously male-dominated Wittenoom community, and led to the introduction of various familiar celebrations and rituals. Many of the men willingly participated in these, which in the absence of the women and children they may never have done.⁴⁷ These were celebrations of significant milestones such as birthdays and religious rituals to mark rites of passage: marriages, baptisms and subsequently, first communions and confirmations. There were also other markers of normality: modest improvements to their homes (which many believed belonged to CSR), the acquisition of family pets, the establishment of vegetable gardens and chicken pens: these now became common sights (see figures 76 & 77). For some, their first experience of cinema and radio occurred in Wittenoom. Rosa Tamburri remembered, "In my little town there was no film... I didn't see any film... I didn't see anything... We didn't even have a radio".⁴⁸

Not all families went to the same efforts as the northern Italian family of Lina Tagliaferri to make improvements to their home. The improvements she and her husband carried out are an example of what the longer term resident Italians were prepared to do to re-create a little of the Italy they had left behind. With her husband, Beppe at work, Lina collected rocks which he then fashioned into a grotto, paths and a fountain. Beppe also built two bird houses to attract local birds (see figure 79).

⁴⁷ From an unpublished paper entitled 'Daily Life in Wittenoom: the Italians' attempt at normality' which I delivered at the Australasian Centre of Italian Studies Sixth Biennial Conference - New Directions, held at the University of Melbourne, 13-16 July 2011.

⁴⁸ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 74: Lea Guagnin in Wittenoom 1957. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 75: Four year old Fulvia's birthday outfit. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.

Housed in the grotto was a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. One of the early Catholic priests in Wittenoom had ordered it for the family. No doubt, the inspiration for this addition to their garden was the roadside altars which are found in the Italian countryside (see figure 78). When I saw Lina's photograph with Our Lady of Lourdes, it reminded of a similar photo my parents had taken during their one visit home to Sicily in 1977.

In Wittenoom religion played a role, albeit an ambivalent one, in the lives of the Italian residents. From various accounts, Italian men and women attended mass. Before the opening of the Catholic *Corpus Christi* church in Wittenoom in November 1955, mass was said about once every three weeks in the local state school.⁴⁹ With the arrival of the Italian wives, a choir was formed to sing hymns in Latin during the Latin mass (see figures 80– 83).

If the women were to engage in community life, the acquisition of English was important. Few Italian women had any familiarity with it; instead they relied on their children or other Italians who spoke the language, until they could master enough situational language. The Italian men are reported, on occasions, to have set up their unsuspecting wives for embarrassing situations with Australians: the women naively repeating English phrases, interspersed with expletives, which their men had taught them. Most of the women would learn the language as best they could, to get by. For the women who socialized mainly with other Italians or stayed home to look after children learning English proved a much slower process.

Anecdotal accounts of the size of Italian families reveal that some couples had as many as six children. Among the research participants the number of children in their families varied between two and five. Many of these were born in Wittenoom. The experience of child birth in Wittenoom led many Italian women to travel to Perth for subsequent births.

⁴⁹ Email from Sister Frances Stibi, Archivist, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, March 24 2011.



Figure 76: A vegetable garden in Wittenoom. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 77: A chicken coup belonging to neighbours of the Guagnins. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 79: A bird house to attract local bird life. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.



Figure 78: The grotto. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.



Figure 80: Altar of Corpus Christi Catholic Church 1957. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 81: Wittenoom Catholic church one of the few remaining buildings in September 2010.



Figure 82: The Catholic convent September 2010.



Figure 83: Internal view of the church in 2010. The altar in figure 80 is in the background of this photo.

Cecilia Bonomi did not mince words when she described her treatment during the birth of her first child, Andrew: *“perchè il dottore capiva un corno... Quello lì andava bene con le vacchenon con le donne.”*⁵⁰ Yet she had nothing but praise for the hospital matron, Mrs Kempton, a French speaker who made regular home visits, once Cecilia had gone home with her new baby.⁵¹ Cecilia Bonomi recalled instances of babies dying. Living on the main road of the town, she witnessed many funerals: “You always saw them... passing by... They were taking them to the cemetery... babies”. (see figure 84, Extract of Wittenoom General Cemetery lists) For the birth of her second and third sons, Cecilia went to Perth where she was hosted by another ex-Wittenoom Italian, Mrs Panizza, from the Trentino Alto Adige (see figure 85). They had become friends in Wittenoom; it was a friendship which lasted till Mrs Panizza’s death.⁵²

Giving birth in the Wittenoom hospital was at odds with the women’s experiences of childbirth in Italy, which occurred in the home. Lina Tagliaferri, in the final hours before the birth of her son, Carlo, remembers being left in her Wittenoom hospital room with windows wide open and not being allowed to change into warmer clothing. She could do that once she had given birth, she had been told by the doctor. Lina was annoyed at the doctor’s lack of sympathy. The nurse had also failed to notice Lina was cold when later that night she came in to inquire about her rate of contractions. Lina reported she had no more pain. The nurse’s reply that the doctor had said the baby would be born that night prompted Lina’s reaction: “Not in tis [this] room!” When asked why she replied: “Because it’s like a fridge! Look at my foot”! The nurse responded: “Ah, you want a blanket”? By then it was 10 p.m., two hours after the doctor’s earlier visit. At 11.30 p.m., a healthy baby boy was born (see figure 86).

The cultural differences continued the next morning. Lina refused the boiled eggs she was brought for breakfast and was offered no alternative. In Italy, as Lina explained to me, for a month after child birth a woman avoided heavy meals.⁵³ Lina’s limited English and the doctor and nurse’s lack of Italian and their apparent lack of understanding of the cultural

⁵⁰ Because the doctor didn’t understand a thing... He was better suited to work with cows.....not with women!

⁵¹ Cecilia Bonomi was a fluent French-speaker, having spent time in France, as a child. Mrs Kempton’s grandfather was French.

⁵² Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

⁵³ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

differences associated with childbirth practices created misunderstandings in what was an already emotionally-charged experience.

After the birth of their children, Italian parents then celebrated religious rituals important in their culture: Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations (see figures 87 & 88). Rosa Tamburri is but one example of the cross-cultural bonds which developed between Wittenoom neighbours of different ethnic backgrounds: she was asked to be the godmother to the daughter of her neighbours — a German/French couple (see figure 89). The traditional white outfits worn by both girls and boys for these rituals had often been sent by family in Italy or Perth. Many of these special occasions were celebrated with a party; with neighbours of all nationalities in attendance. Birthday parties for children, 21st celebrations for the adults and other festive occasions such as farewell parties for departing workers were common occurrences (see figure 90).

Marriages also figured in the women's stories. Several Italian women became *sistematte*, in its strictest sense, once they married.⁵⁴ Cecilia Bonomi told me that her marriage to Mario Bonomi, in 1953, was the first in Wittenoom, celebrated in the state school, as the Catholic Church had not yet been built (see figure 91). Cecilia had, in fact, married Mario by proxy before her departure for Wittenoom. Marriage by proxy was generally used as a means by single Italian men who had emigrated but looked back home to find a suitable wife. In contrast to one report of government findings, proxy marriages were not necessarily confined to southern Italians who came to Australia.⁵⁵ Cecilia Bonomi and her husband were both northern Italians: she from Friuli Venezia Giulia and her husband from Lombardy.

Wittenoom became a meeting place for the young single Italian men and the few single Italian women who went there, chaperoned by their male siblings. One man jokingly quipped that female attention was eagerly sought by the men, even if the woman was married.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Marriage is the first way an Italian achieved sistemazione. When I was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I recall that anyone in my family considered old enough to marry would be asked "*Allora, quando ti sistemi?*" Well, when are you going to settle down?

⁵⁵ Vasta, *Op Cit.* p.144.

⁵⁶ RAI TV documentary on Italians in Western Australia, (c. 2008). Viewed thanks to teacher of Italian, Vicky Melia, Servite College, Tuart Hill, September 2010. At the Siderno restaurant in Osborne Park,

GENERAL CEMETERY 24/29

REGISTER OF BURIALS

No. of Burial	Name of person buried	Age	1—Last place of abode 2—Place where death occurred 3—Date when death occurred	Date of Burial	No. of Grave	Depth of Grave	Remarks of Grave 1—Commemorative Ground 2—Section 3—No.	Name of Minister of other person officiating at ceremony	Was previous Burial? (If no, have entry)	Underground Vault
24	Garnett, Gladys, Married Burial	55y	Wittenoom	15-1-61	19	6ft	O.P.R.	H. Smith	✓	A.C.
24	WITTENOOM, Elizabeth	MD	14-1-61	18-7-61			24		✓	
25	H. Naughton, Paul Witten, Vicky Ann	6y	Wittenoom	22-9-61	11	4ft	C.P.E. 26	H. Smith	✓	M.F.S.
	Wife: Vicky Anne Cindy			21-9-61						
26	EBBINE, Beville Graham	35y	Wittenoom	1-12-61	12	4ft	C.P.E. 26	H.F. Disher	✓	M.F.S.
	MAD. PARKER WITTENOOM	74y		17-12-61					✓	
27	ROBERTSON, Thomas	24y	30-11-61	27-12-61					✓	
	Colony of Abode									
27	WILBERT, Wilton Lawrence	33y	Wittenoom	24-2-62	37	6ft	R.C.	J.A. Baden	✓	G.S.
				23-2-62						
28	BEVALQUA, Anthony	5y	Wittenoom	6-7-62	39	4ft	R.C.	J.A. Baden	✓	G.S.
				5-7-62						
29	PARDI, Paul	3y	Wittenoom	21-8-62	38	4ft	R.C.	J.A. Baden	✓	G.S.

Figure 84: Extract from the Wittenoom General Cemetery Register. Those highlighted in yellow are children's graves. Courtesy of Lorraine Thomas.

my waitress, Anna Argese, had told me that she had viewed the Italian TV documentary during her year 12 Italian class at Servite College.

Romances blossomed from initial encounters in the work place, through chance meetings among neighbouring families or after the introduction to a brother's work mate. Sometimes the interest which had sparked the romance went unnoticed until the decision to marry was announced by the couple. Rosa Tamburri recalled that her sister, Julie D'Uva (the family was from the Molise region) met her future husband (from Sondrio, in Lombardy) in Wittenoom, where both worked in the Single Men's mess. Venera Uculano mentioned that several female teachers married men they had met in Wittenoom. Venera, too, would meet her partner, Umberto Favero, there.⁵⁷ There were also instances of de facto relationships.⁵⁸ Inevitably, the higher proportion of young males in the Wittenoom population without partners resulted in visits to the town prostitute. Valentina Giannasi mentioned one fellow, Enrico.⁵⁹ He was a good man she recalled but like some of the men who had come out very young to work at Wittenoom, he had been caught up in the drinking and gambling. "He gambled on the horses, and when he wanted a woman, he gave her \$100."

Dealing with the Gambling and Drinking

The accounts of the Italian women confirm that gambling and drinking were widespread. Nonetheless their presence hindered, to some extent, the peer pressure among the men to participate in these activities on a regular basis. Married men would fall prey as readily as the single ones. With a wife present in Wittenoom, there was the possibility that a man could curtail those activities.

Valentina Giannasi's husband liked a drink and cigarettes. She used the small monthly sum of compensation from an injury he had sustained during his time in France to

⁵⁷ Both Venera and Umberto were interviewed for various newspaper articles both in and outside of Australia during their many years in the town. Coatney, C., (1997), 'Outback Outcasts', *The Christian Science Monitor*, Monday, May 5th. Schmitt, H., (1990), 'Town of Death', *Women's Day*, October 2. Schmitt, H., (1990), 'Wittenoom', *The West Australian*, Saturday September 8, sec. Big Weekend. Schmitt, H., (1983), 'At 78, Ruby is defying gloom... while Vera counts her many blessings', *The West Australian*, August 12, sec. West Women.

⁵⁸ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, September 2010. The instance Lea recalled finally ended in marriage for the couple at Wittenoom.

⁵⁹ Pseudonym. Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

pay for them. Valentina managed the family's finances and made sure the bulk of her husband's pay went to the bank to pay for the home they were purchasing in Perth.

Nazzarena Mirandola recalled that in her boarding house there were always four or five men present because they worked different shifts. In a disapproving tone, Nazzarena continued: "They gambled. They played cards... of every type". It was for this reason that Nazzarena wanted to leave Wittenoom, for even her husband had started to participate. She was happy for him to work because they were sending money back to their family in Italy, but she was not prepared to see their resources squandered in that fashion. She felt for the "young boys" (as she called them) for they were as young as 18 years of age, and even younger by some accounts. Nazzarena could not stand to see them lose their money after they had worked so hard and were breathing in that dust. "There was nothing else to do and families would get together and gamble – Italians, Germans – they were from everywhere up there", she explained.⁶⁰

For Lina Tagliaferri and her husband Giuseppe, it was possible to save for their home because according to Lina there was not much entertainment. The only attraction Lina mentioned was the hotel. She asked: "Who goes to the pub"?⁶¹ The wives of the mine personnel may have, but she certainly did not. "In eight years I never went", she said. Nor did her husband frequent the hotel. He had beer at home, if he wanted a drink, she told me. In contrast, the account of Valentina Giannasi suggests that the weekend visit to the Fortescue Hotel was an outing for the whole family. Valentina did not like beer — she and the children usually had a lemon squash — but she loved being a part of these gatherings. The hotel was one of the places where people of all nationalities could catch up socially, in what became a tightly-knit community.

⁶⁰ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

⁶¹ Who goes to the pub?



Figure 86: Lina Tagliaferri and son Carlo born in Wittenoom in 1954. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.



Figure 85: Andrew, Frank & Luigi Bonomi, all born during their family's residency at Wittenoom in the 1950s. Photo courtesy Cecilia Bonomi.



Figure 87: Christening day of one of the Bonomi children. Photo courtesy Cecilia Bonomi.



Figure 88: First Communion of Lina's daughter Maria. Photo courtesy Lina Tagliaferri.



Figure 89: Rosa Tamburri and her goddaughter. Photo courtesy Rosa Tamburri.



Figure 90: Farewell party for a Canadian manager c. mid 1950s. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.



Figure 91: Cecilia & Mario Bonomi on their wedding day leaving the Wittenoom State School 1953. Photo courtesy Cecilia Bonomi.

Valentina Giannasi also spoke about the *piccole feste* (small get-togethers) organized in Wittenoom town hall on a Saturday or Sunday. She savoured these happy moments with her reunited family, after the three years of separation from her husband. Valentina recalled that people of many different nationalities attended. They were *tutta una famiglia* (one big family), she reminisced: “All friends together, partying, a glass of beer, dancing. It was alright. Only there was this disaster of this dust.” Otherwise Wittenoom was a beautiful place in her eyes.

Cecilia Bonomi and her eldest son, Andrew, both spoke nostalgically of the supportive Wittenoom community in which their family lived for nearly ten years. “A lot of people didn’t leave because of the camaraderie”, according to Andrew Bonomi. He described the Wittenoom community as resembling the environment you find in country towns. “It was a very tight community... Most people there were outsiders, foreigners.” Andrew recalled that people spoke of the impact of World War 2, which had brought them from all parts of Europe. His mother, Cecilia, continued, “We spoke our English: a bit you understood, some you didn’t!” Friendships developed and continued “even when we spread all over the place, we always wrote”, she explained.⁶² Tony and Gina Martino’s story has a similar theme:

Tony: We stay for three or four years.
Gina: You make a home.....You got people.....They nice.
It’s like a family... you know what I mean? You know
everybody... everybody knows you... you don’t want to
get out of there.⁶³

The Italians’ family photographs of their time in Wittenoom confirm the women’s pride in their personal appearance. The Italian notion of “*far bella figura*”,⁶⁴ no doubt, underpinned their dress sense, as I remember it influencing that of my own family. Photographs illustrate the elegant dress sense among the women, with their one good outfit kept for special occasions. Not all of the celebrations and traditions in which these Italians engaged had been common practice for them back in Italy. As with many Australian cities and country towns, horse racing was a significant event in Wittenoom. Everyone from miles around was in attendance, including the Italians.

⁶² Interview with Cecilia and Andrew Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

⁶³ Interview with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁶⁴ Creating a good impression.

The Wittenoom Races was the one very special occasion in the town's extensive calendar of social events, which also included fancy dress balls and parties organized for the town by the local Catholic committee and other social groups. The big race gave not only the men a day off from their heavy work, but the wives also were afforded respite from their daily routines, with some taking the opportunity to sew a new outfit for the occasion (see figure 92).⁶⁵

Wittenoom residents looked forward to all these events to relieve the drudgery of their daily lives; all the while unaware of the health dangers asbestos exposure posed.



Figure 92: A group of Italians enjoying the Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.

⁶⁵ My mother often spoke of a new dress to wear for an important saint's feast day in Italy, when she and her family watched the procession of the saint's statue through the town.

The Women's Knowledge of Mining Diseases and the Working Conditions

The women had no knowledge of asbestos-related diseases during their stay in Wittenoom. They knew from the men's stories that work in the mine and the mill was very difficult. One of Nazzarena Mirandola's boarders had told her that he could not take working in the mine and left. She explained: "*Morivano giovani.....che sa che l'amianto.....non è tanto.....*"⁶⁶ She did not end this sentence, but her comment regarding what she had been told by her boarder had merged with what had become known later, rather than what she knew at the time about the hazards of asbestos. When I asked her what the workers knew, she repeated that "They didn't know! They didn't know"! When her husband had gone to Australian Blue Asbestos to apply for his job, "nothing was said." Her understanding at the time was:

These things [illnesses] didn't exist. They had terrible coughs from going underground. These boys explained to me, especially the younger ones... poor things... They did two or three years and then they returned to Italy... They didn't work long because of their health... They told me that underground there was a dust which was incredible.

Nazzarena recalls that the men did speak among themselves when they saw a worker being sent to Perth due to a cough he had developed, "because by then he had tuberculosis. That was known". They would say, "if we are not careful we'll end up like Angelo". They all thought he had tuberculosis.⁶⁷

The detail in the description of the mine, which Lina Tagliaferri was able to give, suggests it was a topic of conversation with her husband.

The mine you don't enter standing. You walk in to the main corridor but when you got to the stope you either went on your knees or crouched over because they didn't make the beams high. They made them low because they only pulled out where there was good material (ore)... They had pillars to support... every now and again... eh, eh,... it was horrible.

She, like the other wives, did not know about the health dangers of asbestos. "No one knew of the damage it [asbestos] brought. Because if someone had known.....(her daughter Maria

⁶⁶ They were dying young.....you know that asbestos.....is not very...

⁶⁷ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

continues for her) no one would have gone there.”⁶⁸ By November 1957, seven years after their arrival, Lina’s husband had become very ill. She was impressed neither by the hospital facilities nor the doctor’s ability to treat her husband: “*era un ospedale di poco*”.⁶⁹ He had come home from work one day with a fever similar to influenza. She remembered it had been a Tuesday. Wednesday morning he had gone to the hospital and was given some tablets. By Friday he was back at the hospital because he felt no better. The doctor changed his tablets. On the Monday, he was worse. He went back to the hospital and this time was admitted. They gave him a penicillin injection. By the following Tuesday he had deteriorated again and it was only at Lina’s insistence that her husband was sent to Perth. He had missed the Tuesday flight. Planes left Wittenoom every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. On Thursday the doctor sent Lina’s husband to the Royal Perth Hospital.

It was fortunate he went to the Royal Perth. They saved him. They saved him with a course of penicillin injections... If instead of the Thursday flight, he had taken the Saturday one, no one would have saved him from Karakatta.⁷⁰

Lina lacked confidence in the Wittenoom doctor. In her opinion, he was not experienced in lung diseases or surgery. While she was adamant about the need for her husband to go to Perth for treatment, there was no knowledge of what was in store for him because of his exposure to asbestos. She remembers the visits from the mobile x-ray unit, but no one died of an asbestos-related disease while Lina was in Wittenoom during the 1950s.

Reasons to Leave and Stay

There were still a few Italians in Wittenoom when the mine’s closure was announced in December 1966, but by then most Italians had left the town.

I asked Nazzarena Mirandola if the Italians stayed longer than other migrant groups at Wittenoom. She hesitated as she thought how to answer this question. She then compared Australia of the 1950s and 1960s to Italy’s current situation with the *extra-comunitari*.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁶⁹ The hospital was poorly equipped.

⁷⁰ Karakatta is Perth’s cemetery. Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁷¹ Illegal immigrants entering Italy from Central Europe.

Like here.....the heavy work.....who comes to do it? It was the same then because there were few Australians going up to the mine.....There were... a few young men... but up there in Wittenoom they were almost all Italian.⁷²

Nazzarena Mirandola felt that the Italians stayed longer because they were prepared to make more sacrifices. She remembered that those who stayed had their families present. Nazzarena insisted that her family leave because she could not and would not tolerate the gambling any longer.

Lina Tagliaferri compared Wittenoom to a seaport, with people arriving or leaving all the time, to explain why she and her husband decided to stay as long as they did — seven years, from 1951 to 1957. Lina saw people come and go: “There was the guy like us who arrives and stays for years and there’s the guy who arrives and stays a month and then says: ‘Oh, no I’m leaving’.” She reflected upon how they came to their decision: “We didn’t decide anything”.⁷³ They had originally thought they would stay for just a little while, but then remained because of the certainty of work.⁷⁴ During her visits to Perth, she could see that people in the city had no money with which to buy a home. These people were renting and this did not appeal to Lina and her husband. Those who had left Wittenoom quickly did not have the money Lina and her husband would eventually save to buy their home in Perth.

Italians also took into consideration that they had family back in Italy, including aging parents, to whom they sent remittances. Lina Tagliaferri explained: “*Non mica pensare solo per noi lì [in Australia] e dimenticare quelli là [in Italia] non si poteva!*”⁷⁵ Lina explained, “Then a year passed, then another and you start to get used to the life there and you stay there because you think: What will we do down there [Perth]? I have to find work”.⁷⁶ Lina and her family’s decision to return to Perth was pre-empted by her husband’s illness and what was to become a lengthy period of hospitalization.

Unlike most Italian women, Venera Uculano stayed in Wittenoom long after the mine’s closure. As A.B.A Limited’s secretary, she remained the last employee on the payroll

⁷² Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

⁷³ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, October 2009.

⁷⁴ In the back of their mind was always the uncertainty of employment back in Italy.

⁷⁵ We couldn’t just think of just ourselves here [in Australia] and forget them there [in Italy], we couldn’t!

⁷⁶ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, October 2009.

until all of the company's affairs had been wound up. She then worked for ten months at the Fortescue Hotel as a waitress, until iron ore magnate, Lang Hancock, offered her a job as his secretary, north of the Tropic of Capricorn. She and her partner Umberto Favero were so enamoured with the Pilbara lifestyle that they stayed for nearly 40 years. They returned to live in Perth in 2002.

Conclusion

The women who went to Wittenoom added another dimension to what, till then, had been a male dominated community. For many of the Italian women, going to Wittenoom had allowed families to reunite after what had been lengthy separations. Like the men they were shocked by the conditions, but such was the character of these women that they found ways to make do and provide their husbands, brothers and boarders with the moral and practical support they needed to endure the difficult working conditions in the mine and mill.

The women's stories suggest the mutual understanding and acceptance of the husband and wife's complementary roles: the man went out to earn the money, while the woman looked after the family and managed the finances. Italian women in Wittenoom, however, also reflected the increasing number of working migrant women in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s who engaged in paid work.

Their presence injected a sense of normality into the men's lives and led to the creation of a tightly-knit community based on family values. This was noticeable in the case of the Italian families as they introduced rituals and rites of passage they had celebrated in Italy, as well as participating in some typically Australian traditions.

Chapter Six - Childhood in Wittenoom

I do not have a hate for the town [of Wittenoom] or the surroundings. My mum may have a different view, but she was there to work. I worked a lot. My wife says I never had a childhood. The reason I like [Wittenoom] is because that is the place where I had a childhood. In Italy I was sick a lot. My father worked overseas. My mum had to work. I would be left with one of my aunts. Apart from some cousins [I] never really socialised. Somehow it couldn't or didn't happen. Up there I had lots of mates. [I] got up to all sorts of mischief — a lot of memorable moments.¹

The mining town had given many Italian families the possibility to reunite. Unaware of the health consequences that working and living in Wittenoom would bring in the future, they had taken their families and given birth to more children during their stay.

The experiences of 25 children — born or brought to the town — inform this chapter. Six of the 25 were born in Italy, and one in Alexandria, Egypt. Seven were born in Perth or country Western Australia and then taken to Wittenoom. Another eight were born in the mining town, while the mothers of three children, prompted by previous difficult childbirths in the Wittenoom hospital, flew to Perth for the births and then returned to Wittenoom. Seven of these children shared what they remembered of their time there. They and their parents made mention of the others during my fieldwork. Twenty thousand men and women lived in Wittenoom, as well as nearly 6,000 children.² Those who were children in Wittenoom are now in their fifties, sixties and early seventies.

The parents who participated in this research all declared they would never have taken their children — or themselves for that matter — had they known about the dangers of asbestos exposure.³ Their claim is difficult to refute, given that the Italians went to Wittenoom

¹ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

² Vojakovic, R. (2000), 'The Human Cost of Asbestos Disease', a paper delivered at the *Osasco Conference*, Brazil, p. 3.

³ Information from this chapter was adapted for a journal paper I had published in November 2011: Di Pasquale, Op Cit.

in the first place to create a better future for their families. While not related to asbestos exposure, extracts from the Wittenoom cemetery register reveal childhood deaths occurred.⁴

Despite the children having witnessed the deaths of family and friends because of an asbestos-related disease, only a few touched upon the uncertain future they face when I spoke with them. Instead their narratives reveal a connection with the town which has persisted to this day. As one participant put it, they had childhood experiences “the city kids could only dream of”. Family photographs, along with those supplied by the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia and the wife of one keen Wittenoom photographer, the late Toni Ranieri, illustrate the children’s stories or fill in gaps which there would otherwise have been in this chapter. The childhood memories of several participants have, nevertheless, remained vivid because of the emotional impact of their particular experiences.

In piecing together their childhood, the now adult children are aware that many of their memories are the result of popular family stories, their parents’ promptings and photographs.⁵ The focus and experiences of the children in Wittenoom are of a different nature to those of the men and women. For the children, who still retained memories of life in Italy, the freedom associated with being in Wittenoom was considerable, and particularly notable in the boys’ stories. The stories of the boys and girls contain common elements, despite certain topics seeming to be a function of the child’s gender and, more particularly, their age while in Wittenoom.

The girls’ stories often lack the detail of those of the boys’. This may be because the girls were granted less freedom than the boys, were too young while in Wittenoom to remember, too much time has passed or they may have judged events as unremarkable and consequently failed to share them with me (see figure 107 girls dancing). The stories, especially among the younger children, suggest an idyllic experience in the tightly-knit mining community, while their parents worked to achieve the family’s *sistemazione*. Importantly Wittenoom had given many Italian children back their previously absent father.

⁴ Wittenoom cemetery register from 1952 to 1962 (supplied by resident Lorraine Thomas during my visit to Wittenoom in September, 2010.) Between 1953 and 1962 of twenty-three listed burials, eight were those of children from newborn to two and a half years of age.

⁵ See Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, *Op Cit.* p. 39. They posit that the construction of self is closely associated with learning how to produce self-narratives which are first articulated as “memory talk” within the family, which includes photographs and the like along with stories told in conversation.

Childhood: in Italy and Wittenoom

Maria Scali, Alvaro Giannasi, Lidia Nellini (nee Giannasi), Andrew Bonomi, Fulvia Valvasori (nee Guagnin), Maria Detoni (nee Caffieri) and Nadia De Laurentis (nee Caffieri) all spent part of their childhood and/or adolescence in Wittenoom. Their combined experiences provide the reader with a sense of what life was like for children and why the place remains significant to them. To understand the importance of Wittenoom in their lives a brief account of childhood in Italy is relevant.

The Italian children's migration experiences were ultimately a consequence of their parents' migration choices. Yet it is in making a comparison between their lives in Italy and Wittenoom that we may obtain a sense of why Wittenoom was and still is important to many of the Italian children. The recollections of Alvaro Giannasi and his younger sister, Lidia Nellini, offer some insight into the dynamics and daily life of families of the post-war period in Italy. Their experiences would have been similar to those of many of the Italian children who went to Wittenoom.

Alvaro and Lidia Giannasi were born in the village of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, surrounded by greenery and hills. The village is in the province of Lucca, Tuscany. During their early years, they lived for a significant length of time without their father's presence. He had emigrated in search of work. Their maternal grandparents were share croppers, part of the *mezzadria* system of farming. Alvaro described his maternal grandparents' home which would have been typical of Italian village life in the 1950s and 1960s.

You had to walk [a] distance to go to the fountain on the other side of the road to get water, because there was no water in the house. There was electricity, and by that I mean, lights, and maybe... one... power-point, but no running water. So it was common to go with a bucket and fill it up.⁶

Alvaro, Lidia and their mother, Valentina lived in their paternal grandfather's home, which also housed their father's extended family.⁷ An older aunt cared for them while their mother worked. Alvaro and Lidia's father, Bruno Giannasi, had immigrated to France in search of work. Migration was not new to the Giannasi family: in the early 1900s Bruno's own father

⁶ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

⁷ For a discussion of Italian family demographics see Miller (2004), Op Cit.

had gone to the United States for work, returning to his home town some years later. The very young Lidia remembers feeling confused by her father's absence, when other fathers in the village were present. Similarly, as a young boy Alvaro had few memories of his father because of Bruno's infrequent visits home. Both children, nevertheless, recall particular gifts which their father had given to the family.

Lidia knew from her mother's stories that her father brought on his visits home or otherwise sent his wife 'nice chocolate and the occasional nice petticoat, something that she [mother] didn't have.'⁸ Alvaro remembers vividly his father's gift of a German shepherd dog to him. The children's mother worked in a cheese factory in the town. She had no other choice because the remittances from her husband were not sufficient to support the family and the gifts he sent most likely expensive. This may explain Bruno Giannasi's annoyance upon hearing that the dog had been sold for a carton of beer.

Alvaro's account suggests the family were self-sufficient and lived within their means:

I never remember buying meat, other than mince from the butcher. We had our own rabbits throughout the year... Christmas or Easter it was chicken. I don't even remember much salami — other than what my grandfather used to make.⁹

Alvaro was a sickly child and had more than his fair share of accidents — two of which had left him hospitalised. A third hospitalisation had also been necessary to perform a hernia operation in order to meet the Australian government health requirements. Despite his mother's and the doctor's assurances, for the seven year old boy it was a frightening experience. In 1960 Bruno Giannasi left for Australia directly from France; the travel costs had prevented his return to Italy to farewell his family. Not long after his arrival, Bruno went to work in Wittenoom on the picking belt in the mill. By 1962 Bruno had saved enough to sponsor his family. Once settled in Wittenoom, with his family reunited, Alvaro would thrive.¹⁰ The Giannasi family would stay in Wittenoom until their decision to settle in Perth in 1966; where the family had already purchased a home.

⁸ Interview with Lidia Nellini Perth, October 2009.

⁹ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, December 2008.

¹⁰ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

In contrast to their parents' toil, life in Wittenoom proved liberating for many of the Italian children. The sense of community in the town may explain why Italian parents permitted the freer life style their children enjoyed. Andrew Bonomi explained:

The kids....it was a very close-knit community... you know... It was going back those days. You didn't have the problems you've got these days... the kids.....You'd leave in the morning... come back in the afternoon... and... nobody had a care. You didn't have to worry where they were because it was safe those days. As kids you used to play in the bush and things like that... run around... (Cecilia: Sometimes there were snakes) and you'd walk home.¹¹

The older children — whether boys or girls — were expected to complete household duties to help mothers run their boarding houses. They did so because they were aware of their parents' sacrifices. Others, too young to perform household duties, engaged freely in their play.

Swimming was a popular pastime for both the boys and the girls, but it is remembered for different reasons by Alvaro and Lidia (Nellini) Giannasi. Lidia recalls having to rely on Father Fitzgerald, the Catholic priest, to go for a swim (see figure 93).¹²

Every Friday... in summer, he would get all the kids who wanted to go in his "ute" and all the kids would be in the back of the "ute" and we'd all be singing songs, so I had fun.¹³

Once Alvaro's father had purchased a Malvern Star bicycle for him, he was able to ride out to the crossings with his mates. "You wouldn't go in the water there if you knew what it was like; we used to do everything in the water, as kids."¹⁴ When cyclones occurred, the dry Fortescue River flooded. It provided the town with its own beach and a popular picnic spot for families. When it was not possible to get to the crossings or the Fortescue River, families created water slides for the children on their back verandas. Lidia Nellini explained that they would

put the hose on the veranda and put the soap and slide up and down... That was our... we didn't have a pool or

¹¹ Interview with Cecilia & Andrew Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2009.

¹² As we see in figure 93 Father Fitzgerald also drove around the children during other events, not mentioned by the children. Venera Uculano told me about The Miss Popular Girl organized by the Catholic church in Wittenoom for fund raising purposes. The winner was the girl who collected the most money. This photograph is most probably of that event.

¹³ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.

¹⁴ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

anything and it was so hot that that's what we used to do.¹⁵

The children's stories made mention of family pets and native animals — all welcome additions to the Italian families' homes. Cats, in particular, were a common family pet, as seen in one of Maria Scali's family photographs (see figure 94). Maria Scali also had fond memories of the family's pink galah, an Australian parrot. Being a handyman, Maria's father had built a bird house to encourage the local birds. The galah had learned a few words in the family's *bergamasco* dialect and was often heard mimicking Maria's mother as she called to her daughter, "*Passa che, Maria!*" [Come here, Maria!] The town's residents adopted a wild donkey which proved popular among the Wittenoom children. Andrew Bonomi recalled it having a pretty tough life, with the children all lined up wanting to ride it. The Giannasis had a pet kangaroo, Joey, until it hopped away. Animals were also kept for food. The Caffieri family kept two emus, along with their chickens. As common as the kangaroos and emus were the racehorse goannas, commonly named Iguanas by the Italians. Nazzarena Mirandola's family photographed the presence of one goanna near their home, in order to show family members back in Italy. Unlike some residents' fear of them, Nazzarena Mirandola's family was unperturbed by the goanna's visits (see figure 95).¹⁶

A number of the children touched on the importance of learning English. For the younger ones, parents explained, attendance at kindergarten facilitated their language learning. For the older ones typical early attempts at speaking English included pointing at objects and calling something by what they thought might be its name. Reading was another way to extend their language. At school, the children read the books of popular children's authors such as Enid Blyton; at home, they read the comic books boarders left lying around. Listening to the radio and singing along with the popular songs of the time also helped. The children recalled that the adults relied on them to learn English so that they might act as their interpreters. This often proved embarrassing for the children; more so due to their parents' inability to speak English rather than the nature of the topic.

¹⁵ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.

¹⁶ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

Italian parents considered education important for their children. In the early 1950s, with the Catholic school not yet constructed, Italian school age children attended the state school, which had been built as part of the town's infrastructure. The younger ones went to the town's kindergarten which had also been established. Lina Tagliaferri learned about the kindergarten from the Wittenoom postman. She recalled that in the early 1950s the kindergarten teachers were the wives of the Canadians working at Wittenoom.¹⁷ Lina Tagliaferri and Nazzarena Mirandola mentioned the importance of sending their children there.¹⁸ Their daughters were always well behaved, and both women spoke highly of their children's teachers. Not all children who went to the kindergarten were co-operative. A story of one of Maria Scali's classmates being sent home by the teacher was, and still is, a source of amusement in her family:

One child played up and she told the child: "GO HOME!! And no more come here anymore!"...Don't come here anymore! And he [uncle Mario] kept saying, because he wanted to learn [English]: "What did she say?" But he couldn't learn but he tried and asked: "What did she say?" [young Maria] She say: "You go home and no come back anymore!" He made me repeat that a thousand times a day.¹⁹

Maria's mother continued the story, laughing heartily as she now told me: She [Maria] say: "the teacher say once... to me, *zio* [uncle] and I remember [what she said]"! Lina's tone imitated the annoyance there must have been in little Maria's voice as her uncle had made her repeat the incident over and over again, in his attempt to learn English.

After the opening of the Wittenoom Catholic Church, *Corpus Christi*, in November 1955, the Presentation Order sent two sisters from Geraldton to run the Catholic school the following January. For seven years the sisters lived in rented premises, until their convent was built in 1963.²⁰ The church had a multi-purpose use. During the week, it was partitioned for use as two classrooms: one room for children in the preparatory year to grade three,

¹⁷ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

¹⁸ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

¹⁹ Interview with Maria Scali, Perth, November 2008.

²⁰ Email from Sr Frances Stibi, Archivist, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, March 24 2011.

while the other accommodated grades four to seven. Maria Scali recalled that on Fridays, it was the pupils' task to remove the partitions for the weekend services (see figure 96).²¹

She also remembered which school had tailings spread on its grounds:

Of course, most of the children went to the state school in a different location... and that's possibly why a lot of young people... there's been a lot of children from Wittenoam that have died of asbestosis or mesothelioma I should say because asbestos... because the government school was lined with asbestos. They had lined the playgrounds and... the Catholic school where I went... had plain dirt... so it was very lucky.²²

From the time of its opening, the Italian children attended the Catholic rather than the State school. To the Italian families frequenting the Catholic school was important; it meant the Presentation sisters could train the children for their First Communion, an important rite of passage in an Italian child's life. Maria Detoni attended both the State and Catholic schools:

I went one year with the nuns. I didn't like that very much because they were vindictive. I went there for one year and made my communion. Then I didn't go there anymore. I did go to the State school originally because the convent opened later.²³

Alvaro Giannasi's description of one of the sisters may explain Maria Detoni's dislike of life at the Catholic school.

She was irate and grumpy for... reasons that we did not understand and she would take it out on the kids and you didn't have to do much to get the cane... This boy called Bruno, who was Italian. Yes, he was naughty... She caned him many times. I got the cane myself. She got him to stand up... in front of the class... She whacked him as hard as you could on the back of the legs... They had big lumps on them... Six of the best across the legs. He didn't cry... That wasn't even me and I hated her for that... I liked one of the other nuns but I just didn't like her.²⁴

Lidia Nellini, Alvaro's younger sister, instead remembers the nurturing she received:

I remember that I needed to go to the toilet and I was too scared to ask... I must have been crying and this nun, I can't remember her name... she picked me up in her arms and carried me outside... I have really nice memories of... school there and... the nuns and the

²¹ Interview with Maria Scali, Perth, November, 2008. The church has stood the test of time and is one of the few remaining buildings in the town to this day.

²² Interview with Maria Scali, Perth, November 2008.

²³ Interview with Maria Detoni and Nadia De Laurentis, Perth, December 2010

²⁴ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, December 2008.

priest. I remember singing songs and so I have quite fond memories of the school.²⁵

Maria Scali's memories of Catholic school life are also happier. She made her First Communion in the Catholic Church with seven of her friends (see figure 97). With her parents' encouragement, she also took the music lessons offered by the Presentation sisters.

Many of the children enjoyed participating in sporting events (see figure 98).

Wittenoom bus driver, Tony Martino, recalled driving the children to the Inter-School Sports in the 1960s. Alvaro Giannasi still remembers the bus:

You've got no idea. We could actually see the road through the bottom of the bus. You could put your foot down and touch the ground. It was just red dust everywhere, red — inside the bus. You couldn't keep the dust out; it was an old bus even then.²⁶

The sports were held over a few days at Port Hedland, where local families hosted the Wittenoom children. Alvaro Giannasi loved participating in the cricket and baseball events, but did not enjoy the home stay experience because of his dislike for traditional Australian food. He explained, "the smell of mutton was off-putting".²⁷ With the mine's closure in 1966, the Catholic school closed.²⁸ The state school remained open until December 1985.²⁹

Maria Detoni, Alvaro Giannasi and Andrew Bonomi also spoke about the drinking and the Fortescue Hotel. The drinking was problematic for some families, while for others it was a means of getting together. Maria Detoni recalled married men, who when sober were nice human beings, could become nasty when drunk. Alvaro Giannasi remembered one family in the town who lived from pay to pay. The parents spent most of their money at the town's pub where they drank until closing time, while their children sat in the car. Andrew Bonomi's memories of the Fortescue Hotel were happier ones: it was a place enjoyed by many on a hot summer's night, and where he was permitted to sit in the beer garden to enjoy a soft drink with his parents.

²⁵ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.

²⁶ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, December 2008.

²⁷ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, December 2008.

²⁸ Email from Sr Frances Stibi, Archivist, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, March 24 2011.

²⁹ Parliament of Western Australia, Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs and Statutes Revision in relation to A Petition Concerning the Town of Wittenoom, p.7.

Retrieved 9 April 2012 from

[www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/Commit.usf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/2B8B3F2F82C7B97831003E94C6/\\$file/ca007.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/Commit.usf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/2B8B3F2F82C7B97831003E94C6/$file/ca007.pdf)



Figure 93: Children on back of the “ute”. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.



Figure 94: Maria Scali with her cat. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.



Figure 95: A racehorse goanna called an Iguana by the Italians, Wittenoom 1962. Photo courtesy Nazzarena Mirandola.



Figure 96: Desks & chairs inside Corpus Christi Catholic Church. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 97: Maria Scali's First Communion Day. Photo courtesy Maria Scali.



Figure 98: A school sporting event c. late 1950s. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.

The Girls

The passing of fifty years has rendered many of the girls' memories of their childhood in Wittenoom hazy. Maria Detoni, seven years old at the time of her arrival in May 1951, and her sister Nadia De Laurentis, born in Wittenoom in 1953, put their paucity of memories down to their time in Wittenoom being so long ago. Nadia attributes her lack of any memories to her young age upon her family's departure in 1961. Maria Detoni's early memories are limited to the normal childhood bickering which goes on between siblings. Maria Scali was 15 months old when she arrived in Wittenoom in 1951. During those early years, she too does not remember much apart from playing at home and Christmas time when they used to go out in the bush to cut down their Christmas tree.³⁰

Christmas was a memorable time for the children: ABA Limited held its Christmas function in the state school. Father Christmas came and every child received a present.³¹ The Giannasi family had an ornamental Christmas tree, seen in a family photograph (see figure 99). The photograph reminded Lidia of the very few possessions they had in their home — as was typically the case for all Italian family homes. Her voice had softened as she told me: "There's our little Christmas tree that we brought from Italy and we're all sitting on these boxes for chairs. We didn't even have any chairs in our little asbestos house".

Focused on their specific financial goals Italian families lived within their means. Nevertheless, they did not deny their children a few toys such as a doll or a bike or clothes for special occasions (see figures 100 - 102). The toys were usually passed on to younger siblings and then on to other children, once a family left the town. Not all children had toys and, as a consequence, had to be very resourceful, as was Lidia Nellini:

We had Sunshine powdered milk up there so we used to go through lots of cans... and we'd... make holes, fill them up with sand and tie strings around them and take them around the block... They made a noise... sounds silly (laughing) but we didn't have any toys.³²

³⁰ Maria did not mention the type of tree, but it may have been a ghost gum. Emilia Oprandi and I noticed many during our trip through the Pilbara in 2010.

³¹ What is not clear is who paid for the gifts — ABA Limited or the children's parents.

³² Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.



**Figure 99: The Giannasi family, Christmas in Wittenoom.
Photo courtesy Lidia Nellini.**



**Figure 100: Andrew Bonomi on his tricycle.
Photo courtesy Cecilia Bonomi.**

At the Wittenoom Races the children were treated to the merry-go-round, brought in for the event. A photograph of a young Andrew Bonomi held by his dad, Mario, on the ride suggests the enjoyment it gave the children and their parents too (see figure 101). Maria Scali's mother recalled that it was important to her husband that their children be happy. Maria's father would give his young daughter £1 [\$2] to ride the merry-go-round, enough to satisfy her for the entire day.

Four year old Fulvia Valvasori went to Wittenoom for six months in 1957 with her parents, Lea and Egizio Guagnin. Fulvia is unsure of the source of her memories: "I don't know if my memories are real memories or photo memory because of the memory of the photo and because she [her mother] says various things".³³ She spoke about the cake tin her mother used to make her father's favourite morning tea cake; playing with friends; getting dirty; having a doll called Jennie; and, having her hair so short that she looked like a boy. Fulvia's mother explained that her father took her to the only hairdresser in the town at the time — a barber. The family has photographs of all these memories (see figures 102 -104). Birthdays were important events and many parents made them memorable occasions for their children. The Guagnins' photograph of four year old Fulvio Sterpini's birthday party surrounded by nearly a dozen other children of a similar age, including their daughter Fulvia, demonstrates the efforts parents went to make life normal for their children in the isolated town (see figure 105).

As we discussed how children entertained themselves, Lidia Nellini touched upon something about which many of the Wittenoom children no doubt wonder, but most did not mention during my time with them:

I used to sit on the floor and play with the asbestos; pulling it apart; used to have fun just threading it and pulling the threads out. That makes me sad because I think: "Is that doing me... Did that do me any harm?" But the rest of it was probably quite pleasurable an experience but not when I think what mum had to go through. It couldn't have been much fun for her.³⁴

Some children who played in the asbestos tailings have paid the price as adults. In 2002, as a 13 year old, Daniel Martino witnessed his 42 year old father Michael's painful death from

³³ Interview with Fulvia Valvasori, Perth, October 2009.

³⁴ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.

mesothelioma. Michael Martino had played in the asbestos tailings as a three year old in 1963 (see figure 106). Yet in 2010, Daniel would speak to me about his father's death with compassion and empathy. During my visit to his home two days earlier, nevertheless, he had left the kitchen table unable to listen to his mother's account of his father's death from asbestos-related disease. Daniel ended our conversation with "I wouldn't like anyone to go through what we've been through".³⁵ His father's absence still weighs heavily upon him. Daniel celebrated his 21st birthday a few weeks later.

From Lidia Nellini's account it is evident that the boarders played an important role in the children's lives. She remembered the protection they offered her:

They were Dutch kids. They must have been teasing me. I got really upset and I remember going home. I must have been crying. Some of the men must have been there and I told them and they said, "Oh, we'll go and fix them!" They were protecting me. Then I felt good because I thought I've got the men on my side!!!!

The generosity of their boarders is something which Lidia still remembers. They would buy Lidia and her brother, Alvaro, Christmas gifts, and every payday the men put money in the children's moneyboxes. "Mum said we bought our bedroom suites with the money we'd saved." The children were also taken in by the boarders' humour:

I guess it was like any other place. In the end it's always sad... when you had to leave there for us as children... for me... I had my cats up there and I didn't want to leave them. I remember that day we had to go I was very upset for all those men were saying... "Wait till you go! We are going to make polenta with those cats (laughing) of yours!!!!"... It was really heart breaking to leave my poor pussy cats up there with those men. I don't know what they did with them.³⁶

In Italian families children learned to help out from a young age. Five year old Maria Scali was allowed a treat from Mario Sterpini's Italian bar which sold *granita* and soft drinks. It was her reward for going to collect the family's fresh bread each afternoon, as soon as it had come out of the bakery's oven. It was her mother's way of teaching Maria about assuming responsibility, as well as learning the importance of taking the made roads to avoid snakes, rather than taking shortcuts through the Spinifex. She was nine years old when her family left Wittenoom at the end of 1957, because her father had become ill.

³⁵ Interview with Daniel Martino, Perth, December 2010.

³⁶ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 101: Mario Bonomi with his son Andrew at Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy Cecilia Bonomi.



Figure 102: Fulvia Guagnin, aged 4, with her doll, Jennie. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.

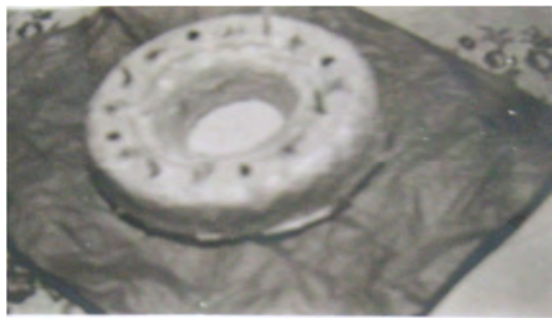


Figure 103: Egizio Guagnin's favourite morning tea cake. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 104: Fulvia Guagnin dealing with the heat. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 105: Fulvia at Fulvio Sterpini's 4th birthday party. Photo courtesy Lea Guagnin.



Figure 106: Noelle, Michael & Julie Martino during a family outing to one of the gorges. The blue asbestos layers are visible in the rock. Photo courtesy Gina & Tony Martino.



Figure 107: A group of girls in Wittenoom. Photo courtesy ADSA, Perth.

As the girls grew older they went to work. Some met their future husbands in Wittenoom. Maria Detoni remembered her first job in the Wittenoom General Store, where she was paid £6 [\$12] per week in the late 1950s. At 18 years of age, she became engaged to Antonio Detoni, a mate of Maria's older brother, Giovanni. In 1963, two years after her departure from Wittenoom, she married Antonio. Years later, she revisited Wittenoom. "What can you say about it? It's a lovely place though... I've been up there again... a few years ago... the gorges... it's a beautiful place.....except for the dust."³⁷

Just as had been my experience as a girl growing up in an Italian family of the post-war period, the girls' stories left me with the impression that they had enjoyed fewer freedoms than the boys.

The Boys

Alvaro Giannasi lives with the knowledge that he could develop mesothelioma, yet he is not bitter about the life he led in Wittenoom. Wittenoom gave him a childhood, which until then he had not known. Alvaro has the most detailed stories of childhood in Wittenoom, but readily acknowledges that some of his memories are vague or influenced by the knowledge he has subsequently acquired about Wittenoom. His stories are, nonetheless, a testament to the fun he had:

We broke all the rules in playing. When I was there...
Playing was full on... like I'd never known it before and I
have to say regardless of whether this place ends up
taking my life or someone even still closer to me, I've got
nothing against the [place]... It doesn't take away from
the fact that... I had the four most memorable years of
my life. And when here in Perth and I told other kids...
here in the suburbs what we did, they just didn't believe it
— that you were allowed to do all these things.³⁸

Stories which Alvaro Giannasi and Andrew Bonomi recounted seem to confirm Alvaro's summation of boyhood in Wittenoom. Unlike his life in Italy, Alvaro was adamant that his life and the friendships he made in Wittenoom were memorable. According to Alvaro, he and his friends pushed the boundaries in their play. Alvaro's closest friends were not boys of Italian background, but three Australian-born brothers — children of Eastern European immigrants, possibly Latvian or Estonian.

³⁷ Interview with Maria Detoni, Perth, December 2010.

³⁸ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

The Wittenoom children were never given homework, as Alvaro recalled it. After school, the boys played marbles, cowboys and Indians and generally chased each other around. Like three year old Michael Martino and other children in Wittenoom, Alvaro played in the asbestos tailings with his toy cars. Many of the made up games were the domain of the boys. One, in particular, was not for the faint-hearted: bottle-top fights. During battle boys threw the tops at each other, with some boys skilful enough to put such a spin on the bottle-top that it could strike another hiding behind a tree. The bottle-top left its mark on the boys dressed in shorts and thongs, but no shirts. The boys also derived pleasure from racing discarded tyres along the roads; all the while demonstrating their deft manoeuvring skills.

While free to roam, the Wittenoom children were not above the law, as Andrew Bonomi explained:

The local policeman was the next door neighbour. There used to be a vacant paddock at the front of our place. I got my arse caned many, many times for lighting it up as a kid. I remember getting into a lot of trouble, including getting locked up in the police station. The local policeman had three children. We were all the same age group and we used to run havoc. Those days, you used to leave in the morning and come back in the afternoon. We were lighting fires. We got locked up in the gaol.

Time in the Wittenoom gaol was an enduring lesson for the six year old Andrew and his friends. "I'll never forget this bloke screaming: 'I'm going to kill youse!' That was probably the best lesson we learnt."³⁹

In Italian households where the girls were too young, their older brothers performed the household duties. Alvaro Giannasi helped in a number of ways to earn pocket money: he collected firewood, swept and mopped the floors, and made coffee for his family and the boarders in the *caffettiera* after the evening meal. To earn extra money, he collected discarded bottles at the Wittenoom races. Alvaro does not remember saving any of that money; rather it allowed him to go to the three weekly sessions at the picture theatre with his friends. It also paid for other indulgences. As the boys and girls became, older curiosity about the opposite sex emerged. Information was often happened upon by accident, but also as the result of someone's organization. Alvaro Giannasi remembers that he and his friends

³⁹ Interview with Andrew Bonomi, Bullsbrook, September 2010.

paid money to satisfy their curiosity, on at least one occasion. “You could even go to a striptease. Just kids stuff... for twenty cents or two shillings.”⁴⁰

Once of working age the older boys, just as the girls did, found jobs in the town. Adolescents like Giovanni Caffieri and Anthony Detoni worked as bus drivers, mechanics and boilermakers in the mill. This proved fatal for Giovanni Caffieri, who died from mesothelioma many years after the mine’s closure.

Not all fatalities occurred after the children’s departure from Wittenoom.

Childhood Illness and Mortalities

Excerpts from the Wittenoom cemetery register dating between 1952 and 1962 record a number of children’s burials.⁴¹ Cecilia Bonomi had commented to me on what she felt was the large number of children’s funerals passing by her home during her stay in the town between 1953 and 1961.⁴² The ratio of childhood to adult burials in the excerpts of the cemetery register I obtained would seem to support Cecilia’s observation. In the period between 1952 and 1953 of the four burials listed, one is for a child, 6 days old; during 1953 and 1954 of the eight burials, three were children — two and twenty-two days old, while the third had no age listed;⁴³ during 1961 and 1962 of the eleven burials, four were children — six months, two and a half years of age, a stillborn (Anthony Bevacqua, son of Giacomo and Lidia) and another two years of age. In all, eight of the 23 listings were of children from newborn to two and a half years of age.

Giacomo and Lidia Bevacqua had two children during their stay in Wittenoom: their first child, Anthony, who was stillborn at birth and Francesca, born two years later. Giacomo’s memory was that the Wittenoom hospital facilities were very poor. His wife developed complications during the birth of baby Anthony. All these years later, speaking about Anthony’s birth is still difficult for Giacomo. He recounted the story in a barely audible voice.

⁴⁰ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

⁴¹ The extracts from the Wittenoom cemetery lists from 1952 to 1962 were supplied by resident, Lorraine Thomas, during my visit to Wittenoom in September 2010.

⁴² Interview with Cecilia Bonomi, October 2009.

⁴³ All the entries for children’s burials show the graves were dug to a depth of four feet, which lead me to conclude that this third entry was that of a child, the grave having been dug to a depth of four feet.

“She was in bed screaming. Doctor wasn’t there. It was night-time. He didn’t help at all. They suffer the baby.”⁴⁴ Baby Anthony had suffocated.

Two of Tony and Gina Martino’s five children — Rosemary and Noelle — became ill while in Wittenoom. In July 1965, Gina and Tony Martino’s daughter Rosemary, aged 10, passed away suddenly, after a brief stay in the Wittenoom hospital. The Martino’s memory of the events leading up to Rosemary’s death is understandably a blur: Tony thought that the doctor was not present in the town; Gina’s memory was that he had continued to see his listed appointments, before attending to their daughter. They both concurred on the nurse’s opinion: Rosemary displayed symptoms of peritonitis due to her high fever. The doctor kept the child in the hospital overnight for observation. By the time her parents arrived the next morning, Rosemary had died. The Martinos wanted their daughter buried in Karakatta Cemetery, in Perth. Wittenoom’s Catholic priest, Father Fitzgerald, drove Rosemary’s body part of the way down the west coast to the waiting funeral director, who then completed the journey to Perth for her burial.

Once having experienced the Wittenoom doctor’s insensitive treatment, many Italian parents and their children went to Perth for necessary surgical interventions and the birth of subsequent children. In the 1950s, it was after the unsparing treatment of Lina Tagliaferri’s nephew during the removal of stitches from his appendix operation, which saw Lina take her daughter to Perth for her tonsillectomy. Lina recalls another Italian neighbour taking her daughter to Perth for similar reasons. In 1964, for the caesarean birth of Giacomo and Lidia Bevacquas’ second child, Lidia went to Perth. The Martinos, after the loss of their daughter Rosemary, nearly lost their youngest child, Noelle, to illness:

Gina: Rosemary [she means Noelle] in a month she got sick. We had to fly to Perth. But they didn’t realize that she had meningitis.

Tony: She was too far gone.

Gina:… She pull through but if I would leave her there [Wittenoom] she would probably die.

Tony: Oh, yeah. They put her into an ice incubator.

Gina: She had a temperature……high.

Tony: We saved her. That’s what happened to her.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

⁴⁵ Interview with Tony and Gina Martino, Perth, November 2010.

Conclusion

As parents toiled to create a more secure future, the children were experiencing a sense of freedom and an idyllic lifestyle compared to life in Italy. It was a lifestyle, in part, made possible because they were living within the safety of the tightly-knit Wittenoom community. While not a perfect life, it gave the children a sense of living together in relative harmony. Their stories too, suggest a sense of normality: not only were they having fun, getting into trouble and learning about life, but their families were once more complete.

Chapter 7 - Sistemazione: Post-Wittenoom

Whatever their circumstances, the majority of Italians departed Wittenoom to achieve or consolidate their *sistemazione* in Western Australia or Italy. This chapter describes the various pathways taken by the Wittenoom Italians. It is informed by the stories of the 36 research participants — eight of whom had returned to Italy, as well as the wife and the son of two repatriated workers who have never been to Australia. The stories of the repatriated Italians lack the detail of those who remained in Perth. Financial considerations meant I was only able to visit Italy once, whereas I made four visits to Perth. Wherever they settled, these Italians' ethic of hard work and desire to achieve financial security proved to be the cornerstone for their eventual *sistemazione*. This was also borne out among the second generation children interviewed. At least a quarter of participants had purchased a home, farm or small business with their Wittenoom earnings by the time they had settled permanently in Perth.

After Wittenoom, the desire for *una sistemazione migliore* [a better future] continued to shape the Wittenoom Italians' work choices. Their achievement of *sistemazione* is evident in their entrepreneurial business endeavours, in farming and their work in construction, mining, timber felling, the railways, as well as their entry into white and blue collar occupations. Narratives revealed long hours of work, with second jobs and overtime providing savings which led to self-employment. Meanwhile in Italy, they worked in government positions and family businesses; developed artisanal skills, with some also becoming self-employed. Those convinced that opportunities were better in Australia then sponsored their family to join them. In Perth and Italy, men and women settled down and started families; married couples decided to have perhaps one or two more children. All continued to economize. Hard work and frugality provided the means for private school education for children; the purchase of investments; remittances to relatives in Italy; and visits home to Italy. Their children have also achieved *sistemazione*, building on the opportunities their parents provided. Several have pursued tertiary education with entry into a

variety of professions and white collar occupations. Others preferred blue collar jobs, with several acquiring a trade.

As they worked towards a more secure future, first generation Wittenoom Italians and their children have had to consider their identity and where they belong; questions prompted by Australians' reluctance to accept Italian cultural traditions. Meanwhile in Italy, Italians who had never emigrated dismissed the necessity of returning Italian migrants' to emigrate in the first place and their contribution to Italy's economic recovery.

The importance of providing economic security for the family remained the focus throughout the working lives of the Wittenoom Italians. This still motivates them today as grandparents and great-grandparents.

Pathways to Sistemazione

The 36 people to whom I spoke are broadly representative of how Italians achieved *sistemazione* in Western Australia and Italy. In their search for work, participants took two main paths: permanent waged employment or self-employment. One couple established a business upon their return from Wittenoom; another after a brief repatriation to Italy. Table 1 shows the breakdown of employment. While the types of waged employment and businesses within those two pathways varied, there is a significantly high number of 59 per cent — when compared with national averages for Italians reported by Castles — who became self-employed. Castles noted that

By 1966, only 8 per cent of Italian men were employers and 11 per cent were self-employed. For women the rates in 1966 were 4 per cent employers and 6 per cent self-employed. However, the trend became reversed, as Italian-born people left the factories and set up businesses. By 1986, only 67 per cent of Italian men were employees, while 10 per cent were employers and 17 per cent were self-employed. For women, the figures were 72 per cent employees, 7 per cent employers and 13 per cent self-employed.¹

The Wittenoom Italians had been motivated by the lack of future prospects in waged occupations. At the core of their employment choices was the desire for a better future.

¹ Castles et al, Op Cit. p. 70

Table 1: Breakdown of employment trajectories of Wittenoom Italian research participants²

Repatriated to Italy	20% (8)
Office workers	12% (5)
Blue collar occupations, Labourers, trades, factory workers or hospitality	59% (24)
Moved to self-employment from waged work	37% (15)
Established a small business post-Wittenoom	22% (9)
Total Self-employed	59% (24)
Tertiary education	7% (3)
Timber cutting pre-Wittenoom	7% (3)
Timber cutting post-Wittenoom	15% (6)
Mining post-Wittenoom, including oil rigs	17% (7 – 2 worked as miners until their retirement)
Farming	15% (6)
Self-employed women	10% (4)

These Italians' stories of their striving for *sistemazione* are suggestive of what Gabaccia calls their entrepreneurial spirit, but it was also about their *spirito della gioventù* [spirit of youth], for many were still in their twenties and thirties.³ Miriam Panizza, ensconced in the warmth of her renovated home in Vermiglio, in the Trentino Alto Adige, explained that this *spirito della gioventù* had been a motivating force for her and husband, Pio (see figure 108). In her seventies and unwell, she would never attempt emigration now.

² The table is based on a total figure of 41 persons, made up of the 36 interviewees and 5 deceased family members they mentioned — twelve of whom are second generation and two third generation members. I have rounded up percentages to full numbers. A number of interviewees fall into more than one category because of their various waged employment experiences and then change from waged to self-employment and vice-versa. Consequently the cumulative figures do not add up to 41; nor do the percentages to 100. Each percentage is based on the actual number mentioned in brackets in each category divided by 41.

³ Gabaccia (2000), Op Cit. p.7.

For the majority who remained in Western Australia, mining and timber cutting were intermediate steps in the search for permanent and well-paid work or the stepping stone to self-employment in a business or farming.

Western Australia

The experiences of Evaristo Scandella, Attilio Oprandi and Umberto Favero are representative of those who worked in mining and timber cutting. As word spread about the high incomes, men headed for the gold mines in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie or outside Cue, to Big Bell. Some stayed in the Pilbara region with the commencement of iron ore mining in the 1960s.⁴ At least one ex-miner worked on the oil rigs in the north west of Western Australia. Timber cutting on the Woodlines, outside Kalgoorlie, or in Merredin, Collie and Wundowie was another option; others still went to the southwest, where Italians had also settled in the late 1800s and during the first three decades of the 1900s.⁵ A few tried both, attracted by the high wages, but most did not last long in either industry.

During the 1950s, many of the Italians who had left Wittenoom went to cut timber for the Kalgoorlie goldmines on the Woodlines.⁶ Once again, migrants dominated the work force, in what were harsh conditions.⁷ Two of the Lombard miners, Attilio Oprandi and Evaristo Scandella, worked there. They reported earnings of £7 [\$14] per 70 quintals (700 kilograms) of cut and cleaned timber. Evaristo Scandella recalled their “hands were so stiff and contracted that they could not straighten them”. Despite judging the work safer, the men slept in tents, with an axe next to them to defend against dingo attacks. Kangaroos were also nightly visitors, attracted by the vegetable scraps.⁸ Scandella stayed two years and then repatriated. His wife had died during his voyage out to Australia in 1951, leaving behind their two young daughters.

After working on the Woodlines, some like Attilio Oprandi ventured to the Coolgardie

⁴ For a discussion of that development see Layman (1981), Op Cit.

⁵ Cecilia, Op Cit. Chapters 14 & 15.

⁶ Bunbury, Op Cit.

⁷ While no less physically demanding than working in the Wittenoom mine, ex-miners from the Seriana Valley of Lombardy reported that the work was much healthier and less dangerous —something which a reading of Bunbury’s account of work on the *Woodlines* would contest.

⁸ Covelli et al, Op Cit. p. 128.

gold mines, where, in Oprandi's view, the working conditions were decidedly better than at Wittenoom, as was the pay. There was also the offer of a rental house for him and his family from the mining company.⁹ His first-born, Francesco, was only one day old the day of his departure on 19 January 1951. Attilio had left his son and wife, Caterina Bellini, in Fino del Monte, a small Lombard village north of Bergamo where she worked and enjoyed the support of her large extended family. Their original plan had been for Attilio to work for three or four years and then repatriate. Instead, in 1955, Attilio, who considered life and opportunities to be better in Australia, brought his family to Coolgardie.¹⁰ On her arrival, Caterina Bellini experienced shock similar to the Italian women at Wittenoom. On the edge of the Western Desert, Coolgardie was very different to the lush landscape Caterina had left behind in the Seriana Valley. With no English, family or friends, and within a year of the birth of their second child, life proved very difficult. Her daughter, Emilia explained:

I think she mourned Italy... Her story is: she gets off the boat at Fremantle with her four and half year old son who doesn't know his father... She thinks she has come to the end of the earth; became pregnant with me. She had to go to hospital to have me. So she thought there was either something wrong with me or something wrong with my baby because you don't go to hospital unless there is something wrong with you. But she got over that one... It was a real grieving for her — the loss of Italy and her family.¹¹

Once the Oprandis had saved enough to place a deposit on farming land in Bullsbrook, they left Coolgardie.

For some Wittenoom Italians mining became a life-long occupation. Such was the case for Umberto Favero. After Wittenoom's closure, he had stayed on in Wittenoom with his partner, Venera Uculano; both having been drawn by the beauty of the Pilbara region. The establishment of iron ore mining in the Pilbara provided Umberto with work in the iron ore mines of Paraburdoo and Tom Price until 1978. He then took up employment with Hancock and Wright as their site supervisor and exploration manager.¹² He supervised 80 workmen

⁹ Covelli et al, Op Cit. p. 128.

¹⁰ This change in attitude was not uncommon among Italian migrants who came to Australia. See Baldassar (2001), Op Cit.

¹¹ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.

¹² From the eulogy delivered by Tad Watroba at the Requiem mass for Umberto Favero on 9 July 2011.

building roads and sampling for iron ore.¹³ Venera, after a brief stint as a waitress at the Fortescue Hotel, became personal assistant to the mining magnate, Lang Hancock. Umberto and Venera were enthusiastic organizers of the many social functions which the remaining Wittenoom residents enjoyed. In addition, Umberto became president and Venera secretary of the Wittenoom Racing Club. They organized the Wittenoom Races until 1990, when concern for the jockeys' health due to asbestos exposure brought an end to the popular Wittenoom event (see figure 109).

Umberto remained with Hancock and Wright until his retirement in 2002, when he and Venera returned permanently to Perth.¹⁴ They were one of the two Italian families to stay long after the 1966 closure of Wittenoom. The other, the Sterpini family, stayed until the early 1980s.¹⁵ They operated as Mario Sterpini and Sons, running the town's newsagency, selling souvenirs and clothing and acting as subagents for a bank.¹⁶

Among the Wittenoom Italians home ownership was a high priority, as it was, generally, among Italian immigrants in Australia.¹⁷ At least half of Italian couples who participated in this research had already purchased a home prior to their permanent departure from Wittenoom. During the 1950s and 1960s, the cost of a home in Perth was between £2,000 [\$4,000] and £3,000 [\$6,000]. Those who had saved a deposit would seek to repay the loan in the shortest possible time, with some returning to Wittenoom to fast track their mortgage payments. There are accounts among single men and Italian couples — where, generally, the wife managed the savings — that they had saved sufficiently within three years at Wittenoom, to have paid for a house in full. This was unheard of elsewhere in Australia among Italians and other migrant groups or Australian-born, who, in general, took longer to achieve home ownership.¹⁸

¹³ Schmitt (1983), 'Living dangerously? Not a bit', *The West Australian*, Monday 8 August, p. 9.

¹⁴ Interview with Umberto Favero, Perth, February 2009.

¹⁵ Mario Sterpini and his family (his son Fulvio was born in Wittenoom in 1954) had arrived in Wittenoom as part of the International Refugee Organization resettlement. They were still there in 1980, as reported in an article by Swift, D., (1980), 'Wild Weekend at Wittenoom', *The West Australian*, June 19, sec. News of the North.

¹⁶ Battye Library, Wittenoom articles: File PR 8679/Wit 12.

¹⁷ Miller (2011), *Op Cit.* p. 94. Castles, *Op Cit.* p. 351. Castles et al., *Op Cit.* pp. 48-9.

¹⁸ Castles et al., *Op Cit.* p. 49, "no less than 70 per cent of Italian households owned their own dwellings outright in 1986, while a further 19 per cent were still paying off their housing loans...By comparison 36 per cent of all overseas-born residents and 35 per cent Australian-born owned their



Figure 108: The Panizza home, Vermiglio, Trentino Alto Adige in November 2008.



Figure 109: 1990, the last Wittenoom Races. Photo courtesy Venera Uculano.

dwellings outright and 34 per cent of all overseas-born and 38 per cent of the Australian-born were purchasing dwellings.”

While several participants could prove that their Wittenoom savings provided a foundation on which to build their futures, others argued that it was their subsequent sacrifices and hard work that helped them achieve their *sistemazione*, not Wittenoom. Whatever their stance, they continued to engage in long hours of work, including second jobs and overtime. Women who had worked in Wittenoom also continued to work elsewhere.

During the 1950s and 1960s, while the expectation in Australian society was for a married woman to stay at home to care for the family, 75 per cent of Italian women worked in paid employment to supplement the family income, compared with 20 per cent of Australian women.¹⁹ In those two decades, all first generation Italian women who participated or were mentioned during fieldwork were in paid employment or in a business partnership with their husbands, both during or after their time in Wittenoom. Furthermore, they remained in the workforce after the birth of their children.

The decision to limit the number of children — compared with their parents' generation²⁰ — was evident in the families of several participants, although not acknowledged during my fieldwork.²¹ Similarly to Miller's findings, this choice was based not on modern ideas of women's right to emancipation but rather migrant women who put the greatest emphasis on family needs, which could only be met by having fewer children.²² More than half of those participating in this research had families of two and three children — mirroring the average Italian TFR [Total Fertility Rate] in Australia, recorded as 3.38 in 1971; a family size which by 1976 had declined to 2.44.²³ At least one family reflected the lower family size of 1.5 recorded in Italy, as reported by McDonald.²⁴ Furthermore, McDonald noted that family sizes for women of Italian origin were estimated to be below that of most other

¹⁹ For the Italian women's statistics see Panucci, Kelly & Castles, Op Cit. p. 69, figure 4.2. For the Australian women's statistics see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1301.0 – Year Book Australia (2001), "A Century of Population Change in Australia", p.8. For a discussion of why Italian women of the post war period in Melbourne, Australia worked see Miller (2011), Op Cit. p. 86. The 1950s were a time when most women stayed at home, with 15% or less in the workforce. The ABA statistics indicated that employment among Australian women increased to about 25 per cent by 1961.

²⁰ Who had had as many as ten and more children.

²¹ For a discussion on fertility rates see Miller (2011), Op Cit. and Miller (2002), Op Cit.

²² Miller (2004), Op Cit. p. 202.

²³ Abbasi-Shavazi, M. J. & McDonald, P., (2000), 'Fertility and Multiculturalism: Immigrant Fertility in Australia, 1977-1991', *The International Migration Review*, 34 (1), p. 230. See also Miller (2011), Op Cit. for a discussion of Italians in Melbourne, Australia who reveal similar TFR's.

²⁴ McDonald, P. (2000), 'Gender Equity in Theories of Fertility', *Population and Development Review*, 26 (3), pp. 427-39.

ethnic groups.²⁵ Similarly, the second generation children of Wittenoom Italians made comparable decisions on their family size, with most participants having one or two children, in line with Australian census statistics of 1.7 for second generation Italians.²⁶

The decision to return to work was often facilitated by the arrival of grandparents from Italy or the support of extended family. One participant spoke of her desire to work for the stimulation it provided, despite the challenge of juggling family and work. The women worked in the clothing and food processing industries, in nursing homes, restaurants, supermarkets and department stores, in locations near their homes to ensure they could attend to family needs. The more entrepreneurial women spearheaded the family's search for a business opportunity and/or contributed to the growth of the business, from which other ventures and investments were funded.

The single men courted Italian women in Western Australia and Italy, married and had children. Marriages among Wittenoom Italians, similar to Price's findings on the first generation immigrants, were more likely to occur within their own group, but they were starting to choose spouses outside their village or region of provenance.²⁷ Proxy marriages occurred, arranged by family in their hometown and conducted when a woman had agreed to join her fiancé already in Australia. Participants made no reference to their preference for intra-marriage, but historians variously explain there was little intermarriage among the first generation Italians with other ethnic groups or Anglo-Australians for reasons such as their inadequate command of any language other than their own, and their difficulty in assimilating given the existing racist attitudes in Australian society at the time.²⁸

Intermarriages began to appear in discernible numbers among second generation Italians, and more commonly among the men; supporting the findings of Khoo et al and

²⁵ McDonald (2000), Op Cit.

²⁶ Khoo, S., et al. (2002), 'Second Generation Australians', (Canberra: Australasian Centre for Population Research and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), p. 136.

²⁷ Price, C.A. (1989), *Ethnic Groups in Australia*. Canberra: Office of Multicultural Affairs.

²⁸ Vasta, Op Cit. p. 144. Price, C.A. & Zubrzyki, J. (1962b), 'Immigrant marriage patterns in Australia', *Population Studies*, 16 (2), pp. 123-33.

Giorgas and Jones.²⁹ In line with the upward trend of intermarriages by Italians, these occurred among the children of Wittenoom Italians in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁰ Of those who mentioned their marital status, at least three of the male children of the 11 interviewed had married women of other nationalities; in contrast to the tendency of the daughters to marry husbands of Italian background. Divorce among Italians was almost unheard of because of their religious beliefs. Accordingly, divorce rates among first generation Italians who participated in this research or were mentioned during fieldwork — one couple in Italy and one in Perth — are in line with the low percentage (1.2 per cent) reported in government statistics.³¹

The stories of Pio Panizza, Paolo Del Casale and Giulio Santini are typical of the young single Italian men's pathway to *sistemazione* after Wittenoom. Pio Panizza left Wittenoom in 1958, still a single man. He went to work in Wundowie cutting timber until he had set aside enough money to start a trucking business with a Greek partner (see figures 110 & 112). Pio was to learn a hard lesson. The partner, whom Pio had thought to be a solid family man, left him with the business's old truck and the debt incurred to buy the new one, and headed to Queensland without his wife and seven children. Like many men of his age, Pio wanted to settle down. He married his *paesana*, Miriam, once she joined him in 1965. She gave birth to their first child, Rosy, in Wundowie where they were living. Within a few years, with Pio's hard work and Miriam's budgeting, they had saved enough for a deposit on a house in Perth (see figure 111). Pio found work as a window cleaner with one of the shire councils. At Miriam's insistence, he left this job on a multi-storey building because of her fears of an accident. Pio found work with a builder, but then ill-health struck Miriam. The doctor's suggestion that they return to Italy for her convalescence was all Miriam needed to insist upon their permanent return.

²⁹ Khoo et al. Op Cit. p.p. 130 & 136. Giorgas, D. & Jones, F. L. (2002), 'Intermarriage Patterns and Social Cohesion Among First, Second and Later Generation Australians', *Journal of Population Research*, 19 (1), 47-64.

³⁰ Castles, Op Cit. p. 351. 23 % by 1976 and 49% by 1986.

³¹ Khoo et al. Op Cit. p. 134.



Figure 110: Pio Panizza cutting timber in Wundowie, 80 kilometres east of Perth. Photo courtesy Pio Panizza.



Figure 111: Miriam Panizza and daughter, Rosy, outside their Perth home.



Figure 112: Pio Panizza beside the truck in which his business partner fled to Queensland. Photo courtesy Pio Panizza.

In the late 1950s, living and working in Perth, Paolo Del Casale was a young man with a sports car and several girlfriends. Going to Wittenoom had been his means to escape all but the one he wanted to marry. Upon his return to Perth in December 1960, he became engaged and by May 1961 had married and started a family. The couple had three children: two boys, one born in 1962, the second in 1965 and their daughter in 1973. Paolo explained:

The young one is a girl born in '73. Yeah, a little bit too far apart. I say two boys that will do! My wife: "I want a girl. I want a girl. I want a girl"!!!! One night I went home a little bit... I went Italian club and when we get home.....³²

In 1961 Del Casale started work as a driver in a saw mill in Rivervale. With over time work, he soon bought his own earth mover which he used on weekends to supplement his income. By 1968 he had developed his own earth moving business and obtained a rail maintenance contract with the railways. He also worked on the construction of the Joondalup line. Paolo Del Casale retired in 2002.

Giulio Santini was still working in Wittenoom in 1960, but had decided to take a holiday in Perth. His plan to return to Wittenoom changed when he met and married Graziella. They worked to buy and pay off their family home; with Graziella staying home after the birth of their daughter. Giulio's first job after Wittenoom was with BHP. Now a married man, the shift work limited the time he could share with his young wife. Subsequently he found work as a rigger with Alcoa, in Kwinana. Within three years he was made a foreman and the shift work ended. He took a voluntary redundancy in 1995.

I asked, "What's the offer?" They said, "Why? You want to leave?" I said, "I just want to know: What's my worth?" When I heard what I worth, I said, "Jesus, I worth that much?!!!!"

With the redundancy payout Giulio and Graziella purchased a sandwich bar. Being self-employed, however, was not what they had expected.

I went from day to night because the lunch bar was a lot of work. We said, "We haven't killed anybody to do this sort of life!" So we sold the lunch bar. Next door came up and I bought next door. We bought the shop, a freehold of a shop in Cannington, and [I] start to do a little bit of maintenance here and there.

³² Interview with Paolo Del Casale, Perth, December 2008.

In Giulio's eyes Wittenoom never provided the basis for his *sistemazione*:

(Deep sigh) If you were greedy Wittenoom was good, but if you were a gentleman... Wittenoom wasn't good. And look, probably this complicates my conversation, but to cut a long story short [it] wasn't the kind of life I wanted, right? For me being up Wittenoom Gorge and if I were to stay here would have been the same thing; the only thing by being at Wittenoom Gorge I done harm on myself by having whatever I could have tomorrow in me you know? But.....ah.....I didn't improve by going up Wittenoom Gorge. My improvements come when I work at Alcoa at Kwinana.³³

At least half the research participants became self-employed as farmers or as restaurant, delicatessen, liquor shop or supermarket proprietors. Many Wittenoom Italians had worked in agriculture — on family owned farms in the south, centre and north of Italy, the steeply terraced vineyards of the Valtellina in Lombardy or as sharecroppers in Sicily, Abruzzi and Tuscany. Among the research participants, it was the former Lombard and Island of Elba miners who became farmers in Western Australia. The Oprandi family's story is typical of several ex-Wittenoom Italian families who settled in the Bullsbrook area establishing dairy farms, or around Wanneroo, on the outskirts of Perth where one Island of Elba family ran poultry and market gardens.

In 1957, having earned enough money from gold mining to put a deposit on land, Attilio Oprandi, his wife, Caterina Bellini, and a business partner bought 160 acres in Bullsbrook, 30 miles [48 kilometres] north of Perth. The land was located in a limestone belt with swamps surrounded by bush, making it suitable for dairy, pig and poultry farming. The family lived in an old asbestos house, with no power, a kerosene fridge and an open fire (see figure 113). A year later, Caterina gave birth to their third child, Renato. It was hard work clearing the virgin land. Their daughter Emilia remembers "mum putting us under a bush and taking the axe. She'd start hacking away at small scrub to clear it. They did it by hand". (see figure 114)³⁴ Attilio worked on the farm and at the nearby Pearce Air Force base to supplement the family income. The children started school and increasingly, the family's life became more linked to their adopted country. For Caterina it was difficult as she endured the isolation and her family's daily absence. The stress of farming and his second job took its toll

³³ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

³⁴ Interview with Emilia Oprandi, Perth, November 2009.

on Attilio's health, culminating in his hospitalization. Emilia explained that "it was just too much. He was off work for three weeks — in hospital and then he came back and carried on. They just carried on".³⁵

The family's combined efforts saw them establish a viable farm, raising cows, chickens and pigs. They sold their cheeses and eggs to various Italian and Greek delicatessens in Northbridge: *Pisconeri's*, the *Re Store*, and *Kakoulas's*.³⁶ In Perth's oppressive heat, Caterina took public transport (bus and then train) from Bullsbrook to deliver her home made ricotta in a fully-laden suitcase, dripping with whey.³⁷ As they became more prosperous, the Oprandis bought a car and built their family home to replace the original *baracca* [shed] (see figure 115). Attilio left his job and took over the deliveries of the cheeses and eggs to the Perth delicatessens.

The Oprandi children, Francesco and Emilia, recall that the family retained elements of their Italian way of life, including the annual pig ritual, where a pig was killed to provide the annual supply of pork sausages and other by-products. This occasion brought many family friends together. It was a daylong activity during which news from Italy was shared, and once the job was finished, everyone enjoyed the sausages and *brösola*.³⁸ Francesco spoke of his parents' love of music and their singing traditional folk songs, such as *Mamma mia dammi cento lire*, *La montanara*, *La villanella*, and *Quel mazzolin dei fiori*.

They were very good singers and a lot of people used to come to our place because we had pigs to make sausages and... have lunch and they would sing songs... till late at night... And even when there was no one around, they would sing quite often. They would actually start singing after tea, while mum was washing up... Mum would start singing and dad would join in.

Emilia recalls that during her childhood she did not see her father often. Her brother, Frank, explained, "He got up most mornings at 4.30. He worked until 10 o'clock at night and that was 7 days a week. We were at work or not there. When do you talk to him?" In fact, all

³⁵ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.

³⁶ The Re store was frequented by Italian customers as far away as Wittenoom, to satisfy their desire for familiar products. During our conversations, Emilia Oprandi had explained that the Re, Kakoulas and Pisconeri delicatessens were the three main suppliers of imported European food for Italian, Greek and Middle Eastern migrants.

³⁷ Bullsbrook was an hour away from Perth by car but public transport would have taken considerably longer.

³⁸ Pork fillet or *brösola* was a delicacy prepared with onion, butter and cream, and eaten with polenta. Interview with Emilia Oprandi, Perth, November 2009.

the family was involved in the hand milking, cleaning out the pigs' pen or hand feeding calves. Emilia carried out the more menial tasks of looking after the fire and polishing the shoes with the pig's lard.³⁹ She described the daily grind:

They'd both get up [their parents] and Frank too because he was the oldest at 5 o'clock in the morning and milk the cows. Dad would go off to work. She'd [mother] do the cheese in the morning. At night time they would go off... get the cows... ready for milking. It was constant. I did a little bit but ... I managed to weasel out of most things. Ray did a fair bit as well.⁴⁰

It was not until the 1970s that the Oprandis finally purchased a 32 volt electricity plant and a milking machine from their neighbours, the Bonomis. In time, several of Caterina's sisters and nieces visited from Italy. She and Attilio travelled to Italy, and also returned to the French village where Attilio had spent a part of his childhood.⁴¹ In the early days after her arrival in Western Australia, it had been Caterina's belief that they would have done equally well in Italy, with the support of her family, and with work available in textile factories of Ponte Nossa, near her home town of Fino del Monte. She altered her opinion during one visit home some years later, when Attilio and Caterina realized how much they missed the family back in Australia, particularly their little granddaughters — Ava and Alyssa. They packed their bags and came home, weeks before their planned return. The birth of their grandchildren had been the source of greatest joy for Attilio and Caterina. Attilio showed another side to his personality. Emilia explained.

When Ava was born, the eldest, I saw a different side to my father... He would never show very much affection to any of us... Kerry would come in over the threshold there; [he took] the baby out of her arms and she didn't get her back till they were leaving... And when mum got sick, he nursed her.⁴²

Attilio and Caterina worked the farm until their retirement in the 1980s. In 1994, at the age of 70, Caterina Oprandi died from cancer. Attilio lived until 2002 when, at age 81, he passed away from emphysema. He also had spots on his lungs related to asbestos exposure from his time at Wittenoorn.

³⁹ A by-product from the pig during the sausage making.

⁴⁰ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.

⁴¹ Caterina Bellini came from a family of ten children — who all had remained in Italy. In contrast Attilio's parents and both his siblings had died by the time he was 25 years of age.

⁴² Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.



Figure 113: The original Oprandi home at Bullsbrook. Photo courtesy Frank Oprandi.



Figure 114: A portion of Oprandi land in 2010, with regrowth of native vegetation.



Figure 115: The Oprandi home built to replace the original baracca.

The self-employed Wittenoom Italians became so either upon their return from Wittenoom or once they realized that blue collar work held no future for them. Several families established successful businesses. They bought existing take away food, delicatessen and liquor businesses, taxi licences, quarries and land to develop vineyards or they established businesses in transport, road surfacing or ventured into hospitality, opening restaurants and catering services. The stories of Rosa and Mario Tamburri, Sue and Toni Ranieri and Lea and Egizio Guagnin are typical of those ventures.

After nearly three years in Wittenoom, in 1960, Rosa and Mario Tamburri had saved enough money to buy a house in an established Perth suburb, Mt Lawley. Rosa found work in a nursing home in the same street, until she became pregnant. Her parents-in-law arrived from Italy in 1961, just before the birth of their first daughter. Finding permanent work was proving difficult for Mario. Eventually, his brother-in-law Danny's (Rosa's brother) recommendation led to work as a driver with the Tolken bakery in North Perth. With her parents-in-law to care for the baby, Rosa returned to shift work at the nursing home. Within two years, using the equity in their home to obtain a bank loan, they purchased forty acres at Wanneroo, north of Perth. They planted a vineyard and purchased a tractor. Weekends were spent there in a shed. Rosa did not mince her words; the emotion in her voice conveyed how she must have felt at the time.

I hated it because we need some good time to ourself!...
I hate to work but dear God, I said... maybe one day we
need it for our little girl because I used to leave my little
girl with my mother-in-law. She used to live with us and I
used to go to work. He [Rosa's husband] used to go to
work.

Rosa was clear about what she saw as her fundamental role:

I said one day I'd like to spend it at home; do some
cleaning; do some washing. Ah, well I had to go to please
him. I went along, otherwise what are you going to do?
Like today, you leave them. Say "bye, bye" and I
wouldn't. He was a good man.....too good... a hard
working man. I wish he enjoyed his life a little bit better,
maybe he would have if he had not.....[she is unable to
finish her sentence].

The Tamburris' hard work paid off. Mario imported a grape pressing machine from Italy. Their *paesani* came to harvest the grapes during the first weekend in March. Wine production eventually reached 4,000 gallons, which they sold to friends. Despite their

success, Rosa continued to find their lifestyle stressful. By 1967 Rosa had become pregnant with their third child. She stopped work, but missed the stimulation it provided. They leased their land in Wanneroo and purchased a combined liquor and delicatessen business, despite Mario's protests:

"Three kids! How can you work in a business? I don't know much about business", he was saying. "I know heavy work outside." (Rosa persisted) Oh, you learn! You learn! Then we bought a shop in North Fremantle and worked there.

Their efforts in this family business bore fruit; within three years they had purchased the freehold. Two years later, they had pulled down and rebuilt the premises. Progressively their energies were required to provide care for their aging and ailing family members.

Mum got sick. We looked after her. My father got sick. I looked after him. My father-in-law, my mother-in-law — I looked after all of them. My uncle and my aunty, they never had any children. They came to me. What are you going to do? Can't deny them; I did my best for everybody.⁴³

In 1974, Rosa gave birth to their fourth daughter. Her mother-in-law had died and her father-in-law now lived with them and helped out in the store. The business flourished. Rosa and her husband decided in 1980 to lease the shop. They also bought a nursing home in South Perth, where Mario carried out the maintenance. In 1982, a few months after the marriage of their first daughter, Mario became ill. His working life at Wittenoom 22 years earlier had caught up with him. Within weeks he was dead.

In contrast to the Tamburris, Toni Ranieri had come back from Wittenoom with no money to show for his three years of hard work. Rosa Tamburri, during our first meeting in 2009, had commented candidly that her husband was the second best miner in Wittenoom, because no one could beat Toni Ranieri. Toni's wife, Sue, explained that in Wittenoom he had been young and the instigator of the many pranks the young Italian men played on each other to relieve the boredom. He had also gambled and lost his hard won earnings. In 1960, after a chance meeting in a suburban grocery store, Toni wasted no time in approaching Sue's family once he heard that the beautiful young woman was unattached. Sue's father, who had been warned about Toni's Wittenoom lifestyle, decided to rely on his own judgment

⁴³ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

of this bright young man. Once married, Toni displayed the same determination and hard work ethic which had made him the top miner in Wittenoom. In an attempt to shore up their mortgage payments, he returned there for a brief period early on in their marriage.

In Perth, Toni worked for a road surfacing business. He saw the earning potential and with an eye to the future, he put it to Sue that they establish their own business in competition (see figure 116). Despite Sue's protests (they only had 25 dollars in the bank) one of her uncles, realizing the potential, helped the young couple to purchase the necessary equipment. Sue, with her primary education, would learn — at Toni's insistence — to estimate the jobs. The professional estimator they had employed to calculate the material needed for their first big road surfacing contract had underestimated the amount required, costing them the profit. Her accurate estimating abilities earned Sue the praise and respect of the Multiplex Corporation. Within a decade the Ranieris became the main subcontractor for the Multiplex Corporation in Western Australia. They eventually sold the successful business. The Ranieris then invested in real estate construction and later set up a ceramics business — New Mediterranean Ceramics. It was to be even more successful than their bitumen contracting business. Channel Seven, Perth and the National Australia Bank conferred awards in recognition of their contributions to the Western Australian economy.

The stress and strain of the long hours and hard work on the self-employed impacted on the health of some. In 1957, using savings acquired from six months in Wittenoom, Lea and Egizio Guagnin purchased the East Perth Supply store, at the corner of Hay and Bennett Streets. They worked the grocery and liquor business for eight and a half years. They also established a catering service. Lea outlined her daily routine:

I work every day, leaving [the] house around a quarter past seven, twenty past seven the latest, with two children. Going to the shop and not be home before 8.30 at night, if you are lucky. Every day and then Saturday and Sunday we have catering.

For Lea, the pressure of her daily duties was relentless. Only now years later, could she inject her sense of humour into her story:

[I had] no free time and then like a **treat**⁴⁴ I was allowed to stay at home Wednesday morning; do all the washing etc and then take the bus and go to work.

Lea Guagnin proudly told me of her customers' reliance on her advice for suitable wines and liqueurs. They were one of the few Perth businesses to stock imported wine and liqueurs.

The long hours eventually took their toll.

I have a nervous breakdown. (long silence) I was exhausted. It happened Christmas Eve. We work from 4 o'clock in the morning till maybe 10 o'clock at night... My sister used to look after Fulvia and Lorraine. We picked them up... went home. We put the presents under the tree and the next day, Christmas day, we had some friends... for lunch and then it happened all at once. They took me to hospital. I was seven days in a coma and then now I'm here! They didn't want me!!!⁴⁵

Lea's ill-health led to the sale of the business. From then on, her husband, Egizio, worked in hospitality as a *maitre d'* in some of Perth well-known hotels: the Palace (now the R & I building), the Sheraton and the Merlin (now the Hyatt).

Repatriation

The Italians who participated in this research had come to Australia for work or were the children of those immigrants. Their intention, several explained, had been to stay for two, three or four years. With the accumulation of sufficient savings, they intended to return to Italy. Yet, two thirds of the Wittenoom Italians remained in Western Australia. Their repatriation plans were either shelved as their children established roots in Australia or when both or one of the parents had decided that there were more opportunities in Australia. Approximately 300 of the 1,100 Wittenoom Italians repatriated, mainly to their region of provenance.⁴⁶

For the repatriating Italians, feelings of nostalgia for Italy and family, coupled with the desire to raise and educate their children in Italy prompted the decision. They, like the Italians who remained in Western Australia, would have to establish a home and find work. The single married and started families; some returned to Australia several times for work, before finally settling in Italy. In the 1960s, Italy began to experience an economic boom.

⁴⁴ Lea Guagnin had emphasized the word.

⁴⁵ Interview with Lea Guagnin, Perth, October 2009.

⁴⁶ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk (2000), Op Cit.

Economic growth was apparent in the north of Italy: agriculture in Piedmont and Lombardy, along with heavy industry, engineering, textiles and clothing factories took on a modern and centralised character in the 'Industrial Triangle' between Turin, Milan and Genoa.⁴⁷

In the Trentino Alto Adige, tourism would provide work for many in what had previously been a region of emigration (see figure 117).⁴⁸ For the returning miners, family members already in established businesses or about to retire played an important role in providing employment opportunities or a recommendation for appointment to a position about to be vacated in one of the various northern Italian industries. The stories of northern Italians Nazzarena Mirandola and Tullio Rodigari and southern Italian Giacomo Bevacqua illustrate the economic inequality between the north and the south and the impact of the high unemployment in the south. By 1986 the GDP per head was over 20 million *lire* in Lombardy, but only 10.3 million *lire* in Sicily and 8.8 million *lire* in Calabria. Unemployment was 7.4 per cent of the labour force in Lombardy and 9.2 per cent in Piedmont, but 16.2 per cent in Sicily and 17.9 per cent in Calabria.⁴⁹

Repatriations occurred within a few years of having left Wittenoom. Unlike his travelling companions to Australia, as soon as Evaristo Scandella had earned enough money to pay his fare home, he went back to Italy. Tragically, his wife had died while he was on the ship to Australia in 1951. His two young daughters remained in the care of his sister-in-law, whom he would later marry. Until 72 years of age, Evaristo continued to migrate to Africa for work. He obtained regular employment contracts lasting two or three years on construction sites. In 2007, Evaristo Scandella died aged 92.

⁴⁷ Castles et al. Op Cit. pp. 36-7.

⁴⁸ Interview with Gino Longhi, owner of the Albergo Milano, Vermiglio, Italy, November 2008. See also Panizza, Op Cit.

⁴⁹ Castles et al. Op Cit. p. 39.



Figure 116: Toni Ranieri in the early days of his business. Photo courtesy Sue Ranieri.



Figure 117: Vermiglio, Trentino Alto Adige, the home of ten ex-Wittenoom miners. It is located in the Val di Sole, part of the Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio: home to several ski resorts and many walking tracks.

In the late 1950s, at age 30, Tullio Rodigari returned to his birth place, Montagna in Valtellina, Lombardy and married his *paesana*, Lina Nesa. His father's retirement as an electrician with the nearby hydro-electric scheme paved the way for Tullio, also an electrician, to replace him. Like his father, Tullio remained in the position until his own retirement. Tullio and his wife's many sacrifices allowed them to raise two children and build a large home, divided into separate apartments, where their now adult children reside.

Nazzarena Mirandola and her husband, Gino Selle's desire for their Australian-born children to receive an Italian education motivated their repatriation in 1964 to their hometown of Roverchiara in Northern Italy. The family stayed briefly with Nazzarena's parents until they found a home in nearby Verona. There, the internationally acclaimed *Arena's L'Ente Lirico*, the opera company, employed Gino as a carpenter — a well-paid and highly sought after position.⁵⁰ Nazzarena remained a housewife. On Gino's retirement, Nazzarena decided to find a job and went to work for a pharmaceutical company. With both daughters married and Gino retired, they gave their home in Verona to their older daughter who had commenced work there as an architect, while the other daughter had married and settled in Rome. They moved back to Roverchiara, where in June 2008, Gino passed away from an ischemia [a blood disease]. Nazzarena still lives in her family home, having survived breast cancer.⁵¹

Repatriation was not always the answer for homesick Italians. For some, returning to Italy highlighted that nothing had changed, particularly in the south. Giacomo Bevacqua, his wife, Lidia and daughter Francesca left Wittenoom with its closure in 1966. Having successfully operated the Single Men's mess, they decided to return to Sicily.

When I finish at Wittenoom we had \$46,000 in the bank. 1966, it was a lot of money. [The] average house in Perth, you used to buy about \$3,000 - \$3,500, a very good house. So I said, "What I do with the money? Put it in the bank and let's go to Italy." See if we see something over there. So I go back to Italy with the intention to stay there — myself, my wife and my three-year-old daughter. I didn't like it once I got there.⁵²

⁵⁰ The Arena is an amphitheatre built by the Romans in AD 30. It is internationally famous for its operatic and theatre performances and pop concerts.

⁵¹ Interview with Nazzarena Mirandola, Italy, November 2008.

⁵² Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.

Influenced by his life in Australia, Giacomo had changed. Meanwhile the social mores he had left behind ten years earlier were still alive and well in Sicily.

I used to talk to friends like you. (He asks me:) What you think of this? They want to be called "Sir" because they have the title — *professore* or *ingegnere*.⁵³ You went to the shops (frustration in his voice). I went down there to buy a jumper. He asked me 3,000 *lire*, at that time. This guy say, "Hey, how you pay 3,000 *lire* for that jumper?" "That's what the girl asked me for!" (more frustration). "You didn't ask for the discount, take for 2,000? You have to bargain for in Italy!"⁵⁴

Bevacqua's parents were still experiencing financial stress — Giacomo's reason for emigrating in the first place. Since his search for a suitable business had proven unsuccessful, Giacomo, his parents and siblings immigrated to Australia. In Perth, Giacomo purchased a supermarket for his parents to manage in the suburb of Belmont. Their lack of English highlighted the inappropriateness of the decision. Giacomo sold the business and set up La Gondola — the first of the thirteen restaurant businesses he has opened during his long restaurant career (see figure 118). He also currently owns a farm which supplies beef, turkey and poultry to his restaurants.

⁵³ Professor or engineer: the use of titles when speaking to educated people — university graduates — was then and still is common practice in Italy.

⁵⁴ Interview with Giacomo Bevacqua, Perth, November 2008.



Figure 118: Giacomo Bevacqua's success reported in a Perth newspaper.

Identity and Belonging

The Wittenoom Italians — adults and children — have had to address issues of belonging and identity. These emerged during our discussions about their reasons for leaving Italy and the decision to settle in Australia or to repatriate. Their experiences are typical of those encountered by other Italian migrants.⁵⁵ In post-war Australian society, rejection of Italian culture impacted on the relationship between Italian parents and their children. Furthermore once *sistemati* in Australia, accounts of visits home reveal the ambivalent feelings among participants as they considered whether they were Italian and/or Australian. Repatriated Italians report having experienced hurt feelings as those who had never emigrated dismissed the significance of their migration decision to Italy's economic recovery in the 1960s. The importance of family and connection to homeland or acceptance in the place they now call home — Australia — have played a role in reconciling their sense of identity and feelings of belonging. Some, nevertheless, remain ambivalent regarding their identity and where they actually belong.

Italian migrants had to deal with the mistrust and lack of acceptance, albeit not by all Australians. They were considered uneducated, dirty and coarse. Meanwhile Italians harboured their own disdain for the Australian way of life. During the post-war years and until the acknowledgement of Australia's multicultural society in the 1970s, Italians' questioning or denial of their cultural identity, notably among the children, commonly occurred in response to these attitudes.⁵⁶ The few examples of intermarriage with other nationalities among the first generation Italians in Australia, perhaps gives some indication where the adults stood on the issue of their identity.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Italian children desired acceptance by their Australian peers and rejected their cultural heritage. This rejection was epitomised in their refusal to maintain or speak with their parents in their mother tongue or to eat "wog" food, notably the *salami* and *mortadella panini* [bread rolls] mothers prepared for them. This rejection also surfaced as children questioned parental aspirations which focused on the pursuit of a higher education rather than, for example, work in the retail industry or the

⁵⁵ See, for example, Baldassar (2001), Op Cit. Castles et al, Op Cit.

⁵⁶ Castles et al., Op Cit. p.53.

⁵⁷ Castles, Op Cit. p. 351. In 1961 the Italian-born rate of intermarriage was 3%.

acquisition of a trade. These choices were influenced by an adolescent's desire to earn money, their rejection by teachers and peers, a lack of interest in tertiary education, or possibly a poor command of English.

Friendships forged by children and adults — between Italians and Australians — eventually helped to reframe the racist feelings directed against Italians and their disdain for Australian traditions. Italian children came to express pride in their cultural heritage and the desire to share it with their Australian peers. Several accounts suggest that friendships between the children, in particular, fostered a more positive attitude among parents: Australians accepted Italian values and traditions and Italians adopted Australian practices more readily. These positive attitudes were reinforced by Australian government policy seeking to value migrants' contributions to Australian society by maintaining migrants' cultural integrity.⁵⁸ Rosa Tamburri's family exemplifies the conflicts which occurred in Italian families, including my own.

Of course, the Italian cooking and now they [the children] are saying, "Thank God we are Italian! I'm so proud of being Italian!" Because some of them [Rosa's children] they have been to Italy. Only one, Antoinette, hasn't been there. She knows a few words from grandma. But coming home from school, "Ohhhh, no way!" And they didn't want to have rolls. They had to have sliced bread.

The reciprocal acceptance and adoption of cultural practices gradually became more common among Italians and Australians. Rosa Tamburri continued:

One night my daughter came from school. She said, "Mum, I got my friend coming for dinner". "Well," I said, "we're having spaghetti". "Oh," she said, "that's what she wants, mum. She wants to try Italian style spaghetti". "Ok, that's fine", I said... We sitting at dinner and she said, "Mrs Tamburri, this spaghetti are beautiful. Where do you buy them from"? I said, "... Buy the pasta"? "No, no", she said, "the can"! I said, "No, darling, I make the sauce... cook the spaghetti... put on the plate, put the sauce, put the cheese". She said, "I wonder why mum's spaghetti... she opens up a tin". I said, "Australians don't know how to cook spaghetti. That's the Italian way of cooking spaghetti". Now, those spaghetti or baked beans we have them on toast in the morning! (laughs) But I said "Not for dinner, we cook the proper spaghetti!"⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Castles et al, Op Cit. p. 230.

⁵⁹ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

Rosa applauded the change in attitudes, but nevertheless, noted that the more recently arrived migrants are encountering similar experiences to those of migrants who arrived in the post-war period.

The Italian-born children, old enough to remember Italy, feel a sense of loss — something with which their parents have also had to grapple. Giulio Santini, now a grandfather, lives in Perth with his wife. Their daughter and her family are nearby. He still feels Italian and has made several trips to Italy because of his strong emotional ties. Yet, as a result of his experiences during his visits, he no longer identifies with Italians in Italy. He sees them as “...*sgarbate. Non hanno visto di meglio e tu devi dire sì ad uno che non sa quello che dice. Questo ti irrita e quindi bisogna sopportarle*”.⁶⁰ His strong attachment to his town is, however, evident in the recounting of his childhood and religious rituals. Each year thousands of pilgrims visit the sanctuary of *La Madonna dei Miracoli* [Our Lady of Miracles] in his town. He is also a devotee.

*Mi commuovo in un modo tale che non hai idea...andare là perchè ho fatto l'altar boy there fino a diciotto anni, right? Poi come ho detto prima, battezzato, prima comunione, cresima, you know tutto là. C'è un legame sentimentale forte!*⁶¹

Vincenzo Ubaldi has also settled in Perth. He has made several visits to Italy; his first in 1976, thirteen years after his arrival in Perth. I asked about the possibility of his returning permanently; the response is an ambivalent one.

They live a good life there [Italy] too... but....(Angela: However, you never wanted to stay in Italy or did you?) No, but I can adapt... I have settled down very well here... If some day I decide to leave here, who knows!.....I reckon I should have stayed there. I would have been more concentrate. In one way I'm happy here... if I would put my mind into it when I was in Italy I should have stayed... There's opportunity there too.⁶²

⁶⁰ Rude. They haven't experienced better and you have to say yes to someone who doesn't know what he is talking about. This is annoying. So, you have to tolerate them. Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

⁶¹ It moves me in such a way that you have no idea...going there...because I was an altar boy till I was 18 years old...Then, as I said before...baptised, First Communion, Confirmation...everything there. There is a strong emotional tie.

⁶² Interview with Vincenzo Ubaldi, Perth, December 2008.

For the children, now adults with families of their own, visits home are a way to deal with their feelings of loss, even when the issues of “Where do I belong?” and “Who am I?” surface. Lidia Nellini speaks of the ambivalence many feel.

I've always been proud of being Italian. That's one thing that I think... can't take away from me. I've always... I don't know where it came from but I'm Italian. I'm not a naturalised Australian but it doesn't mean that much to me... but I guess when I'm in Italy I probably feel more Australian. I don't know what I do when I'm here. I feel almost like I'm torn between two countries, if you know what I mean.⁶³

Alvaro Giannasi explains the depth of his loss and his need to visit his birthplace.

Not that people were crying out for me. It is just for my own thing. I can't explain it. I had this feeling that I had to do it... had to go there.... I needed to go. I can't explain what came over me. It was a little bit like... a death and you want to go and visit the tomb.⁶⁴

To keep connected, Alvaro subscribes to two magazines: *I Toscani del Mondo* and *I Toscani nel Mondo*.⁶⁵

Baldassar, writing on repatriating Italians, found that they were often left disappointed and hurt when the Italians who had stayed behind dismissed the significance of their decision to migrate on post-war Italian society and its economy.⁶⁶ Such was the case for Pio and Miriam Panizza.

Pio: You will be speaking with someone: “I had to go to Australia”!
Miriam: Those who stayed here have to thank those who went overseas.
Pio: That's for sure because they found work after the others left and if you say something to them they laugh in your face too because there are people who laugh in your face. They say, “You could have stayed here just as I stayed here”!... If I'd stayed here!
Miriam: If everybody stayed here.....
Pio: I would have taken your job! But they don't understand this.
Miriam: Yes, all of those who emigrated created wealth for the town.⁶⁷

Furthermore, several of the now adult children born in Australia, question their parents' decision to repatriate. Just as their parents did, they face the challenge of unemployment or

⁶³ Interview with Lidia Nellini, Perth, October 2009.

⁶⁴ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

⁶⁵ *The Tuscans of the World* and *Tuscans in the World*. These magazines publish migrants' accounts of their experiences in their new homeland or their reminiscences after a recent visit home to Italy.

⁶⁶ Baldassar (2001), *Op Cit.* Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ Interview with Pio and Miriam Panizza, Italy, November 2008.

fewer employment opportunities in an Italy with her own set of economic and political problems in the 21st century.

Sistemazione: the Children

Despite having had to deal with the issues of belonging and identity, the children of Italian migrants have also attained a successful *sistemazione*. Caterina Bellini's and her husband Attilio Oprandi's decision to settle in Australia is indicative of why many Italian parents remained.

*Abbiamo sempre avuto nostalgia di Fino e della nostra gente, ma quando si poteva vendere e tornare era troppo tardi perchè i figli erano cresciuti e lavoravano e loro in Italia si sarebbero trovati nella condizione di emigranti proprio come noi quando siamo venuti qui.*⁶⁸

The Wittenoom Italians' children have succeeded in a range of fields. Their parents' sacrifices and their own motivations have assured them of a *sistemazione* if not better than, at least equal to that of their parents.⁶⁹

Children of Italian background have come a long way in spite their lack of social privilege and the economic disadvantage they experienced.⁷⁰ The 1996 Census findings, reported in Khoo, on educational qualifications for second generation children born in Italy or in Australia of Italian parents are summarised in Table 3 below. Khoo indicates that about 20 percent of second generation Italians born in Australia or Italy had achieved either a degree or diploma. 25 per cent had acquired a vocational/trade employment. More females (55 per cent) than males (24 per cent) were in clerical positions.⁷¹ The 12 second generation children who participated in this research have generally established themselves in line with Khoo's analysis of the 1996 Census findings for second generation males and females of Italian

⁶⁸ "We had always felt homesick for our town of Fino and for our people, but when we could have sold and gone back, it was too late because the children had grown and were working and they in Italy would have found themselves in the same condition as migrants just as when we had come here." Covelli et al., Op Cit. p. 128.

⁶⁹ Similar findings were reported by Miller, P. (2007), ' "My Parents Came Here with Nothing and They Wanted Us to Achieve": Italian Australians and School Success', in Franklin, B. M. & McCulloch, G. (eds.), *The Death of the Comprehensive High School? Historical, Contemporary, and Comparative Perspectives*; (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), pp. 190-1 and by Castles, Op Cit. p. 357.

⁷⁰ Miller (2007), Op Cit. p. 190.

⁷¹ Khoo, Op Cit. p. 81, Table 5.2 & p. 90, Table 5.9. Percentages for clerical and vocational/trade occupations of second generation Australian-born persons by parents born in Italy were derived from table 5.9 on page 90. Percentages of second generation Italian children's qualifications by parents' birthplace (Italy) were derived from table 5.2 on page 81.

born parents. Second generation males and females from my sample of the Wittenoom cohort demonstrated a move away from their parents' unskilled, manual occupations into degrees, trades or clerical positions. They are summarised in Table 2 below. 80 per cent (4 of 5) of males had achieved some form of trade and 20 per cent (1 of the 5 males) had graduated from university. 57 per cent of females (5 of the 7 females) were employed in white collar jobs and 43 per cent (3 of the 7 females) had obtained university degrees.

Table 2: Career Paths 2nd Generation Wittenoom Children of Italian parents

	Degree/diploma	Vocational (trade)	clerical
males	(1) 20%	(4) 80%	(0) 0%
females	(3) 43%	(0) 0%	(4) 57%
*N = 12 (5 males; 7 females)			

Table 3: Career Paths 2nd Generation Children of Italian parents in Australia aged 35 - 44, 1996.⁷²

	Degree/diploma ⁷³	Vocational (trade) ⁷⁴	clerical ⁷⁵
males	23%	34%	24%
females	19%	16%	55%

The statistics suggest the positive change in attitude regarding a daughter's education, in contrast to "an earlier patterning of investing in sons' but not daughters'

⁷² Khoo et al, Op Cit. pp. 81, 90

⁷³ Ibid. Table 5.2, p. 81: Percentage with qualifications: second generation aged 35-44 by sex and parents' birthplace, 1996. (See 2nd Generation Italy – parents)

⁷⁴ Ibid. Table 5.9, p. 90: Occupation of employed Australian born persons aged 35-44 by parents' birthplace, 1996 (See MALES: Italy and FEMALES: Italy).

⁷⁵ Ibid. Table 5.9, p. 90: Occupation of employed Australian born persons aged 35-44 by parents' birthplace (See MALES: Italy and FEMALES: Italy).

schooling” with a now “strong emphasis on the educational qualifications of both genders”, in line with Miller’s findings.⁷⁶

The stories of Fulvia Valvasori, Andrew, Luigi, Frank and Claudio Bonomi, Alvaro Giannasi and Frank, Emilia and Renato Oprandi in Perth and the daughter of Nazzarena Mirandola and the son of Evaristo Scandella in Italy, depict the types of *sistemazione* the children have achieved in business, professional and white or blue collar fields.

In Italy, from the 1970s onwards, due to limited employment opportunities facing most adolescents, including those of my own extended family in Sicily, it was becoming common practice to remain at university to complete a degree and then move north for employment. Resident in the north of Italy, the daughter of Nazzarena Mirandola, an architecture graduate found work with the ‘*Beni Culturali*’ in Verona.⁷⁷ Severino Scandella, the son of Evaristo conducts an electronics business in Bergamo, Lombardy. In Australia, Fulvia Valvasori became a qualified secondary teacher. That she is respected among her peers is confirmed by her positions as president of the Italian Teachers’ Association of Western Australia and the Modern Language Teachers’ Association. She acknowledges wanting similar outcomes for her children to those her parents had for her.

It must follow on. I was very keen for my kids to go to uni.
I didn’t push them, but I was very keen for them to do it.

Yet, as Fulvia also points out, tertiary education is not the only marker of success among the children of migrants, despite many migrant parents focus on education as the key to success and a better *sistemazione*.

That came from the migrant thing of education: “You have to have a university education”! My husband just the other night said, “I wonder what would have happened?” My daughter was talking about one of her boyfriend’s friends who is an electrician and has just bought this monster house. My daughter was saying, “He didn’t even go to uni! He’s an electrician, left school at 15 but he’s making a fortune”. My husband said, “See kids of migrants who struggled [they] made us go to university because that was success — a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher”. In the family that’s the mentality not having had the opportunity of education and therefore making us ... whereas those perhaps [who] didn’t — they

⁷⁶ Miller (2007), Op Cit. p. 191.

⁷⁷ Restoration of culturally significant buildings.

became wealthier than all of us because of a trade.⁷⁸

By 1994 Alvaro Giannasi had set up his own successful business as an electrician. His son has also qualified as an electrician and has joined him in the business. Alvaro does not recall either he or his sister being pushed into any job or profession. He has no regrets about his career choice. Cecilia Bonomi's sons have all made their own way in life. In the 1980s Andrew Bonomi spent time in Northcliffe, forty kilometres south of Pemberton. He ran a dairy farm, possibly influenced by his own experience on the family's farm in Bullsbrook. In the 1990s, Andrew came back to Perth. He set up a fabrication business, which still operates today. His younger brothers are also *sistemati*: Luigi is an accountant, Frank, an electrician and Claudio works for the government. The Oprandi children too are successful in their chosen fields: Renato trained and worked as an electrical fitter and is now in management; Emilia is a solicitor; and Frank maintains the family farm as well as working at Pearce Air Force Base, just as his father did many years ago.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges to their cultural identity and their questioning of where they belonged, the desire for *sistemazione* continued to spur on the Wittenoom Italians wherever they finally settled. Wittenoom had proven a point of transition from economic uncertainty to a more certain future for most of them. Wittenoom savings allowed many individuals and couples to purchase a home, farm or business and convinced a prospective Italian father-in-law of a single Italian male's worthiness to marry his daughter and start a family.

The Wittenoom Italians' proven work ethic made them desirable employees. Nevertheless, the realization that their hard work was making their employer wealthy, while they received a wage, prompted many to work overtime and second jobs to provide the funds for their own successful business ventures and other investments. Their sustained efforts also provided the basis for their children's *sistemazione*. Many have attained success in a variety of fields, acquiring the educational and trade qualifications their parents had aspired

⁷⁸ Interview with Fulvia Valvasori, Perth, October 2009.

to for them. These second generation children, in turn, have provided opportunities for their own children to do the same.

As the Wittenoom Italians worked to achieve *sistemazione*, the consequences of their time in Wittenoom became apparent. All who have gone to Wittenoom have had to deal with the legacy of Wittenoom.

Chapter Eight - The Legacy of Wittenoom: Disease, Death and the Ticking Time Bomb

Whilst I like the place, because I've had the most memorable time there: it's a little bit like having the most fun time driving in a car and owning that car and in this case you own it for years and the thing that you love kills you. You have an accident and it kills you.¹

As the Italians pursued pathways to *sistemazione* post Wittenoom, the impact of asbestos-related diseases was to become apparent. Most workers and residents had left Wittenoom in an apparently good state of health, unaware of the health issues some were facing. The transience of the Wittenoom population had ensured that stories of those already displaying signs of disease were not widely known.

Several participants spoke of loved ones or family friends who returned from Wittenoom already displaying symptoms of asbestosis which ended in their deaths after 20 to 25 years of progressively deteriorating health. More alarming among the ex-Wittenoom population was the emergence and increasing numbers to die an excruciating death from mesothelioma within a year of its diagnosis. By the mid 1960s some research was suggesting that anyone experiencing even trivial exposure to asbestos could develop mesothelioma.² Western Australian researchers published predictions of the mortality rate from asbestos-related diseases among the surviving Wittenoom population. As this information spread among the apparently healthy ex-Wittenoom workers and residents, they have had to live with the fear of the ticking time bomb: that they too could die from mesothelioma.

Warnings of the dangers of asbestos exposure and its consequences have been and continue to be circulated by organizations such as Perth's Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia. Participants and their family members are very familiar with the role of the ADSA; some having had reason to consult the ADSA for legal advice to mount a damages claim once diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease.

¹ Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, September 2009.

² Castleman, Op Cit. p. 128.

Despite ongoing research, asbestos-related diseases have no effective treatment, and mortality rates have continued to rise from both occupational and environmental exposure.

Asbestos-Related Mortality Statistics and Predictions in the Wittenoom Population

The ramifications of the asbestos-related disease asbestosis were being documented in research literature prior to CSR's acquisition of the Wittenoom asbestos mine.³ Unfortunately for the workers and residents located near asbestos mines and factories, asbestos corporations ignored the health warnings. Later those same corporations would expect insurance companies and governments to pay for the burgeoning compensation costs for diseased workers, and made determined attempts to avoid damages payments to residents who developed an asbestos-related disease.⁴

The Wittenoom blue asbestos mine is acknowledged as Australia's worst industrial disaster.⁵ Had CSR heeded the warnings of the Department of Health doctors and Department of Mines Inspectors during the mine's 23 years of operation, it is likely that fewer people would have died. Asbestos-related deaths in the ex-Wittenoom population are reported in researchers' findings on the incidence of asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.⁶ One early study on Wittenoom workers, in fact, received CSR funding.⁷ In response to increasing mortality rates, in 1989 and 1991 Western Australian researchers produced predictions of 2,898 deaths in the Wittenoom worker population by 2020 due to ARDs, with a predicted total of approximately 700 cases of mesothelioma. Berry's predictions

³ See Castleman, Op Cit.

⁴ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. see Chapter 6.

⁵ Layman (1994), Op Cit. p. 305. McCulloch (2006), Op Cit. p. 3.

⁶ See, for example, Reid, A., et al. (2007), 'Age and Sex Differences in Malignant Mesothelioma After Residential Exposure to Blue Asbestos (Crocidolite)', *Chest*, 131, pp. 376-82. Berry, G., et al. (2004), 'Malignant Pleural and Peritoneal Mesotheliomas in Former Miners and Millers of Crocidolite at Wittenoom, Western Australia', *Occupational Environmental Medicine*, 61 (14). Hansen et al. (1998), Op Cit. Cookson, W. O. C., et al. (1986a), 'Prevalence of Radiographic Asbestosis in Crocidolite Miners and Millers at Wittenoom, Western Australia', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 43, pp. 450-57. Elder, Op Cit.

⁷ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 378. Vojakovic & Gordon are referring to the study of Hobbs, M. S. T., et al. (1980), 'The incidence of pneumoconiosis, mesothelioma and other respiratory cancer in men engaged in mining and milling crocidolite in Western Australia', (30; Lyon International Agency for Research in Cancer, IARC Sci Publication), 615-25.

suggested a wide range of between 250 to 680 deaths from mesothelioma because of uncertainty of the relation between mesothelioma rate and time, and insufficient data to estimate the elimination rate of crocidolite from the lungs.⁸ Findings on the incidence and mortality rates due to ARDs in the general Western Australian population are documented in the Western Australian Cancer Registry (WACR) statistics and in Federal government reports. These statistics do not distinguish the current mortality rates in the ex-Wittenoom population from mortalities which have been reported elsewhere in Western Australia.⁹

Workers, their families and A.B.A. Limited executives had all been exposed to blue asbestos. The amount of exposure depended on whether they worked in the mine or mill, lived in the executives' settlement a kilometre from the mine or in the town of Wittenoom located 11 kilometres away.¹⁰ As early as 1945 Mines Inspectors' reports had disclosed that the greatest amount of dust was produced in the milling process.¹¹ The lack of effective dust control measures meant miners and millers both experienced high levels of asbestos exposure. Town residents were also exposed, as the asbestos reached the town on the prevailing winds and from the asbestos tailings deposited free of charge by the company around the town to keep down the red dust. Unaware of the danger, parents had allowed their children to play in those tailings.

CSR's executives failed to inform the Wittenoom population of the health dangers. Participants with no personal experience in mining, but with some knowledge of associated hazards spoke about the possibility of accidents. Those with previous mining experience were aware of silicosis and tuberculosis, but not asbestos-related diseases. Studies on asbestosis prior to the Wittenoom operation indicated that symptoms could take at least a decade to fully develop. Where there was exposure to lesser concentrations of dust, the

⁸ Berry, G. (1991), 'Predictions of mesothelioma, lung cancer, and asbestosis in former Wittenoom asbestos workers.' *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 48, pp. 793-802. de Klerk, Armstrong & Musk, (1989a), Op Cit.

⁹ See, for example, Commonwealth of Australia (2009), 'Mesothelioma in Australia: Incidence 1982 - 2006; Deaths 1997 to 2006' (Safe Work Australia). Threlfall, T. J. & Thompson, J. R. (March and December 2007, 2009, 2010 & 2012), 'Cancer incidence and mortality in Western Australia, (Perth: Department of Health, Western Australia).

¹⁰ Hansen et al. (1998), Op Cit. McNulty, J. C. (1968), 'Asbestos Mining — Wittenoom, Western Australia', *First Australian Pneumoconiosis Conference* (Sydney), pp. 447-66.

¹¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10571: C. Adams, Inspector of Mine, Cue writes to the State Mining Engineer, 24 October 1945, p. 24.

period of maturation extended to 15, 20 or 25 years.¹² Because of the high levels of asbestos exposure in the Wittenoom worker population, asbestosis was occurring after as little as four years. In comparison, in the gold mining industry in Western Australia, new cases of silicosis, a common miner's disease, took as long as 15 to 20 years to develop.¹³ The transient nature of the Wittenoom population meant many left before the emergence of any symptoms. In contrast, workers who stayed longer departed from Wittenoom displaying signs of ill-health or diminished lung capacity. The first diagnosed case of asbestosis was in 1958, in an Italian scraper driver.¹⁴

The number of asbestosis and mesothelioma cases among Wittenoom workers gradually increased: 103 asbestosis cases were reported between 1958 and 1968, with the first case of a miner's death from mesothelioma in 1960 described in 1962.¹⁵ By the 1970s disease had begun to appear in those who had left the mining town in good health. In 1980 researchers reported 220 cases of pneumoconiosis (occupational lung disease caused by inhalation of dust) and 26 cases of pleural mesothelioma among the 7,000 ex-Wittenoom workers. They noted that the incidence of pneumoconiosis rose with the increasing duration of employment, with the highest rates in the heavy exposure group.¹⁶ By the end of the 1980s there were a further 94 cases of mesothelioma, 141 cases of lung cancer and 356 cases of compensation claims for asbestosis.¹⁷ In 2000 Robert Vojakovic, president of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, reported that among the ex-Wittenoom workers and their families 2,138 men and 92 women had died of an asbestos-related disease.¹⁸ The Berry et al 2004 study announced that by 2000 the cumulative number of mesothelioma cases was

¹² Castleman, *Op Cit.* pp. 14-15.

¹³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 82. Letter from Dr. McNulty, Chest Physician and Mines Medical Officer, Kalgoorlie, to the Manager of the State Government Insurance Office of W.A., 17th March 1960.

¹⁴ McNulty (1968), *Op Cit.* p. 449.

¹⁵ McNulty (1968), *Op Cit.* p. 449. McNulty (1962), *Op Cit.* Hills, *Op Cit.* p. 32 reported the death of Italian miner, Giuseppe Mosconi, from Vermiglio, which occurred in July 1959 at age 42, 24 hours after having been admitted to a Perth hospital. Mosconi's wife showed Hills the death certificate: "Carcinoma of the stomach. Contributing causes: pseudo membranous colitis, pulmonary oedema." Mrs Mosconi did not believe she had been told the truth. She suspected it had something to do with Wittenoom. In light of the fact that Giuseppe's other eight paesani who worked with him in Wittenoom have all died, her conclusion cannot be discounted.

¹⁶ Hobbs et al., *Op Cit.* p. 617.

¹⁷ de Klerk, Armstrong & Musk (1989a), *Op Cit.*

¹⁸ Vojakovic, *Op Cit.*

235 for the men and seven for the women, with 231 reported deaths. The researchers reported that while mortality rates for mesothelioma in Wittenoom workers continued to be high, they were at the lower end of predictions. If the occurrence of mesothelioma continued at the lower end of predictions made after 1986, the researchers predicted there would be a further 110 deaths in the men due to mesothelioma by 2020.¹⁹ As at 2010, deaths due to mesothelioma in Western Australia have surpassed that prediction.

In 2009 a Commonwealth government report, *Mesothelioma in Australia*, revealed that the number of new cases of mesothelioma reported in Western Australia (the fourth highest nationally, despite the state's smaller population) were still increasing.²⁰ In addition, the Western Australian Cancer Registry (WACR) reported in 2005 that mesothelioma numbers for men and women had grown from 565 in 1995 to 1,260 in 2005, although there was a slight decline between 1998 and 2003.²¹ The WACR mesothelioma statistics between 2007 and 2010 (see Table 4 on page 254) recorded a further 459 deaths in total, with male mortality rates (411) much higher than in females (48), in line with other Australian studies.²² 319 of the reported 411 deaths in the men in that period occurred in the over 65 age group. This would suggest that mortality rates for mesothelioma reported by WACR and those in the 2009 Commonwealth report were most likely still significantly attributable to asbestos exposure in the ex-Wittenoom population, given mesothelioma's long latency period and the high levels of exposure they experienced. Nevertheless other occupational groups, among them workers in railway workshops, asbestos-cement manufacturing and on the wharves at Port Sampson and Fremantle (which handled Wittenoom's blue asbestos) had also experienced high rates of mesothelioma.²³ As the surviving members of the Wittenoom population die due to an ARD or from natural causes, cases of mesothelioma due to

¹⁹ Berry et al. (2004), Op Cit.

²⁰ Commonwealth of Australia (2009), *Mesothelioma in Australia*, pp. 11-12.

²¹ Western Australian Cancer Registry (2005), *Cancer in Western Australia: Incidence and mortality 2003 and Mesothelioma 1960-2003*. Compare Anatomical primary site of mesothelioma for 1960-2003 in Table 22, p. 47 with Status of cases on the W.A. Mesothelioma Register 1960-2003 in Table 18, p. 43. These figures take into account the duration of various employment and residential situations, and intensity of asbestos exposure.

²² See, for example, Reid et al (2007), p. 376. Leigh, J., et al. (2002), 'Malignant Mesothelioma in Australia, 1945-2000', *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 41 (3), p. 192.

²³ Musk, A. W. & de Klerk, N. H. (2004), 'Epidemiology of malignant mesothelioma in Australia', *2nd Heidelberg Thoracic Symposium, 2002* (Supplement 1 edn., *Diagnosis and Treatment of Pleural Mesothelioma: Current Strategies and Future Concepts*, 45 Heidelberg, Germany), S21-S23, p. 3.

environmental exposure in the general population, unwittingly disturbing asbestos, will continue to emerge.²⁴

Research on environmental exposure in Wittenoom to the end of 1993 reported that, of the 4,890 respondents from the Wittenoom residential cohort of 18,553, 27 cases of mesothelioma had been diagnosed with another four cases reported five years later.²⁵ By 2002 there were 67 new cases of mesothelioma, of which 64 died that same year.²⁶ In 2008 Reid et al reported on the health outcomes of the 2,968 women and girls who had been in Wittenoom. Four hundred and sixteen of these had worked in Wittenoom between 1943 and 1992.²⁷ The researchers reported 47 mesothelioma and 55 lung cancer cases among the 437 cancers in the Wittenoom females during the period 1960-2005. Mesothelioma incidence rates in the period 2000-2005 had increased to 193 per 100,000, being more than double that for the period 1995-1999, when rates were reported at 84 per 100,000. The researchers predict a further 66 to 87 cases to occur among the Wittenoom women to 2030.²⁸ When they compared their findings to the W.A. female population, they reported that Wittenoom women and girls had higher rates of mesothelioma and possibly lung cancer.²⁹

²⁴ Robert Vojakovic speaking at the Annual Eucumenical Service in Perth, November 2010, which I attended.

²⁵ Hansen, J., et al. (1993), 'Malignant mesothelioma after environmental exposure to asbestos.', *International Journal of Cancer* 54 (4), pp. 578-81. Hansen et al. (1998), Op Cit.

²⁶ Reid et al., (2007), Op Cit.

²⁷ Reid et al. (2008), Op Cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Western Australian Cancer Registry (2005), Table 24, p. 49. In the general Western Australian female population 129 mesothelioma mortalities were recorded between 1960 and 2003. WACR reports for 2005, 2006 & 2008, Threlfall & Thompson, Op Cit. noted another 48 deaths in the general female population. See Table 4 above.

Table 4. Number of deaths from mesothelioma in Western Australia for males and females from 2005 to 2010 with age specific rates.³⁰

Males	Year	Mortality	Mortality	Mortality
		Total no.	40 -64 years	Over 65 years
	2005	60	16	44
	2006	58		46
	2007	71	22	49
	2008	72		59
	2009	79	23	56
	2010	71		65
Total		411	61	319
females	2005	11		
	2006	14		
	2007			
	2008	23		
	2009			
	2010			
Total		48		

The Italian statistics, comprising those who repatriated and those who remained in Western Australia, are a reflection of the Italians' longer stays and higher levels of asbestos exposure. During Wittenoom's operation from 1943 to 1966, as previously noted, of the approximately 7,000 workers from 52 migrant groups present in Wittenoom, 1,100 were Italians. Italian researchers compared causes of death linked to asbestos exposure among Australian-born residents of N.S.W. and Western Australia-born and Italian-born residents of Western Australia. They observed increased mortality for the three ARDs in both the Australian and Italian-born residents of Western Australia, with the increase being greater

³⁰ I have collated these statistics from the Western Australian Cancer Registry research for the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 & 2010 conducted by Threlfall, T. J. & Thompson, J. R. (March and December 2007, 2009, 2010 & 2012), 'Cancer incidence and mortality in Western Australia, (Perth: Department of Health, Western Australia). N.B. The studies did not always provide statistics for age specific rates hence the gaps in the table. See bibliography for individual references.

among the Italian-born residents. Between 1969 and 1985 among the 455 Italian-born residents of Western Australia, 231 — more than half — had an asbestos-related disease: 4 with asbestosis, 8 with primary pleural cancer and 219 with lung cancer.³¹ Three years later Italian researchers concluded that the average life expectancy among Wittenoom Italians in Western Australia had been reduced as result of their exposure to asbestos, when compared to the general population.³²

In Italy, doctors had been aware of the harmful effects of asbestos exposure since the early 1900s.³³ As the century advanced, they were treating growing numbers of Italian workers in asbestos industries across the country with asbestos-related symptoms.³⁴ Eventually this included Italians who had worked in the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine.³⁵ A post-mortem pathology test on an Italian who had worked in Wittenoom during the 1950s revealed a peritoneal mesothelioma and the presence of blue asbestos, confirming the provenance of his asbestos-related disease.³⁶ In 2000 Merler et al. reported that up until 1997, of the 302 repatriated Italian miners, 112 were dead: 10 from pneumoconiosis, 3 from pleural mesothelioma and 4 from peritoneal mesothelioma, the remaining 105 deaths were from an excess of lung cancers or were undefined when compared to the general population. From their findings the Italian researchers concluded that in the cohort of repatriated Italians the serious effects of occupational exposure to crocidolite had been confirmed. Among the survivors many were also suffering from serious asbestosis, but unable to find insurance protection. This created financial difficulties once they became too incapacitated to work.³⁷

Anecdotal accounts among surviving Italians related to me during my field trips to Western Australia in 2008, 2009 and 2010 confirm the statistical evidence. All research participants were able to mention at least one person who had died from complications associated with asbestosis or from mesothelioma. Many had witnessed those deaths. Their

³¹ Merler et al. (1996), Op Cit.

³² Merler et al. (1999), Op Cit.

³³ Carnevale, Op Cit. Aurora, F., Segretario Associazione Esposti Amianto (2004), 'Introduzione', Conferenza Nazionale Sull'Amianto, Monfalcone, Italia, 12-13 November, p. 9.

³⁴ Marinaccio, A., et al. (2006), 'Malignant Mesothelioma Surveillance in Italy: Incidence and Asbestos Exposure by Italian Register (RENAM)', paper presented to European Conference on Asbestos Risk and Management, Rome, 4-6 December, p. 31.

³⁵ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit.

³⁶ Pizzolitto, Barillari & De Cesare, Op Cit.

³⁷ Merler, Ercolanelli & de Klerk, Op Cit. p. 255.

stories of the victims of asbestos-related disease provide the human face of the impact of asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma, which the statistics cannot show.

Living with Asbestosis

Asbestosis typically occurred among those working in the mill where dust levels were considerably higher; however cases were also reported among the miners. Participants recounted that depending on the stage of the asbestosis, men displayed a variety of symptoms: difficulty with breathing upon exertion, reduced lung capacity, clubbing of fingers, lung infections, chronic bronchitis, tuberculosis and emphysema. The treatment for asbestosis often required lengthy hospitalization. The victim's health continued to deteriorate despite having been removed from the source, and eventually resulted in his death.

Whether they settled in Italy or Australia, the men's protracted health issues impacted upon the whole family. Men would have to interrupt work or find alternative employment as the debilitating symptoms and secondary infections to which they were prone made it difficult to undertake heavy or dusty work. Women, feeling the financial pressure, found jobs to supplement their husband's income. Others, at the behest of their husbands, stayed home to look after the children and economized. Although men preferred to work, in the case of ill-health in Australia at least, they received compensation under Western Australia's Workers' Compensation Act when they were too ill to do so. The stories of two families, Lina Tagliaferri and Valentina Giannasi, illustrate the impact asbestosis had on the men and families and the responsibilities wives and children assumed.

After nearly seven years in Wittenoom, Lina Tagliaferri and her husband, Beppe, returned to Perth with their family in late 1957. They had been the only ones to remain from the first group of recruited Lombard miners who had arrived in 1951. Lina and her husband had intended to stay only two or three years in Wittenoom, to take advantage of the permanent work and good earnings. They extended their stay because of Beppe's inability to find permanent work in Perth. An experienced miner, he had even tried gold mining in Kalgoorlie for a brief period, but had deemed it more dangerous than working in the Wittenoom mine.

One day in November 1957 Beppe had come home from the mine feeling very ill. The doctor's treatment proved ineffectual, and within a few days — and only after Lina's insistence — her husband was sent to Perth.³⁸ At the Perth hospital, where he was first admitted, multiple penicillin treatments dealt with the infection, but Beppe was required to stay in hospital. His condition had been diagnosed as asbestosis and required further hospital care. Daughter Maria recalled "unfortunately when he came down from Wittenoom then he had no (she demonstrated his difficulty in breathing) breath and he couldn't do anything".³⁹ Beppe was subsequently admitted to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Lina and the two children followed him to Perth in December, when it had become clear it was to be a lengthy hospitalization.

The family already owned a home, having purchased it during a previous trip to Perth when their young daughter, Maria, had had to undergo a tonsillectomy. Lina and the children spent a year visiting Beppe in hospital. Possibly alluding to tuberculosis, in her description she explained that

He just wasn't well enough. I don't know when it was that they sent him from Royal Perth to there [Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital]. They had told him from 6 to 9 months. After 9 months had passed, they then said he would have to stay more than a year. But when the year approached, they still found him positive and my husband was shocked. Then they kept him in, until the end of the month. Then the professor let him come home... for Christmas... for two or three days. The doctor had told him to tell me... separate dishes... to wash them separately... to not let the children use those he had used.⁴⁰

Beppe underwent treatment, some of which he recounted to Lina only after the event. As she explained the treatment to me, she gestured.

It was all dust from the mine. They gave him so many of those tests. Here they made a hole and a tablet was sent down which went down into the lung like this. He was tied on a table like this. He told me later. He didn't tell me this. He had signed and I couldn't complain. He was tied on the table. When he passed out, they turned him over and stuff came out of his nose and... from his mouth. And of that stuff which came out... that stuff from Wittenoom wouldn't come out — the asbestos — because it gets into

³⁸ It is quite possible that the first reported case of an Italian scraper miner with asbestosis mentioned by Dr McNulty in his 1968 paper was in fact Lina Tagliaferri's husband, for he was a scraper miner.

³⁹ Interview with Maria Scali, Perth, November 2008.

⁴⁰ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

the lung and doesn't come out... the dust from the mine
but not that stuff there.

On weekends, the family travelled back and forth from their Osborne Park home to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in Nedlands. It was a distance of about eleven kilometres, but took an hour and a half by public transport. Hospital protocol excluded visits from children; most probably because of the fear of the spread of infection. This left nine year old Maria and her five year old brother, Carlo, to amuse themselves downstairs, with their parents monitoring them from Beppe's hospital window. Maria remembers her father looking out from the window and throwing down money to purchase a soft drink or ice cream, much to the children's delight.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, when the children were at school, Lina spent hospital visiting hours, between 3 and 5 p.m., with her husband. Bebbe did not like the hospital food, so Lina prepared him home cooked meals. She used fresh eggs from their own chickens and produce from the vegetable garden. In the hospital bed next to her husband was a Polish man, another ex-Wittenoom worker with no family. Lina felt sorry for him and also took him food. If she missed the bus, it meant the children were home alone. She recalled:

I was leaving a little 9 year old at home alone. I would instruct Maria, "When you get home, you can play outside but once it gets dark go inside and lock the door". I had shown her how to use the wood heater. I didn't have an electric heater. I had prepared the kindling and all she had to do was to light it.

Lina wanted to work to supplement the family income, but her husband convinced her otherwise:

"You want to go to work to do what? If you go to work the children will be neglected." I didn't have family to say: I'll leave them with this one or that one. I couldn't. He said — because they were giving him a pension because he was sick...every two weeks — "If you go to work, they won't give you any more than what they give me here... Stay home and look after your children. Economize... If you're a woman who can't, you won't succeed".

Lina was resourceful and found ways to get by, just as she had in Italy, when her husband had worked away from home. As she told me:

They spend too much, wasting for this. You have to get by and because I had a big area I put in potatoes, onions, garlic, chicory, lettuce. I kept chickens for the eggs. There was a lady on the corner who said, "If you have

eggs, bring them to me because I have customers who will buy them".⁴¹

Beppe was finally released from hospital, with instructions to convalesce for three or four months. He was receiving insurance payments, but worked when he was able. Lina does not know what he got into his head, but Beppe decided they should buy a business — a fruit shop and delicatessen. They persisted in the venture for 19 months. Meanwhile every three to six months, Beppe attended the Murray Street Clinic for check-ups. By December 1961 the doctor had warned him if he did not want to return to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital he had to sell the business. The stress of running a business — the early morning trips to the market to buy produce, grocery deliveries and the long hours at the shop — was taking its toll on Beppe's health. In April 1962 they sold the business. Beppe followed the doctor's orders to convalesce for six months. They went to visit family in Italy. Lina, Beppe and the children returned to Perth in December 1962. The option to remain in Italy permanently was not a consideration. Lina explained, "*Stavamo meglio qui che in Italia*".⁴²

On their return, Beppe found work as a taxi driver. Max Italia, a friend from Wittenoom, suggested they buy a taxi licence just as he had done. Once they had saved enough, they did so. Beppe drove the taxi until about a year before his death. Lina recounted proudly the conversation which had occurred between Beppe and their accountant. The accountant had been curious to learn how Beppe had been able to buy the taxi:

It wasn't that he paid a deposit. He paid cash every time. And my husband said to him, "If I give my wife \$10 to put away after 100 years I'll find them here. If I tell her that she must put these away, that's how it is".⁴³

In 1979, with their two children settled, Lina and her husband found tenants for their Perth home and moved to Bullsbrook. They had built a house there on land they had purchased previously. They had made the decision to move to Bullsbrook because Beppe's brother lived there with his family, as did their *paesani*, the Oprandis. They spent many happy hours with both families. Beppe's deteriorating health made it increasingly difficult for him to work. Following his doctor's suggestion he applied for and was granted an invalid

⁴¹ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁴² We were better off here [Australia] than in Italy.

⁴³ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

pension. During our time together in 2008, Lina spoke only briefly about her husband's death in 1983, at age 61:⁴⁴

He went back to hospital — the lung one [Sir Charles Gairdner]. They told him they had made a mistake with his medication (laughs) and he was short of breath. He sold his [taxi] business. He stayed at home, then he became ill and he got... he died... no... otherwise, he...[she does not finish the sentence].⁴⁵

A year later when I spoke with her again, Lina faltered as she spoke about her husband's last trip to the hospital:

He was no longer able to breathe. I woke up and he wasn't in bed. I went out and he was seated on the couch. He said, "I can't breathe"... He left from Bullsbrook. He drove right to Perth, to Panizza, the doctor's... and that guy from the taxi got in contact with the taxi base and they got in touch with Charles Gairdner [hospital]... and they were there with an ambulance and oxygen to meet him. He had his lungs full of liquid. The doctor had understood nothing. He was treating him for other things and his lungs were full of liquid!⁴⁶

It was evident that Lina still missed Beppe as she pointed to a photo of her husband and brother-in-law, prominently displayed in her kitchen. Both had died within 6 months of each other; Beppe from asbestosis and Mario from mesothelioma. She reflected on what had been important to her and her husband during their married life:

We always got by: our children married — my daughter got married. My son... He has no children. My daughter has one boy and two girls.⁴⁷

Later that same year, Lina moved back to Perth. Subsequently she went to Italy to nurse her ailing mother until her death.⁴⁸ Lina then returned permanently to Perth where her children and their families live. Enjoying the benefits of modern technology, Lina keeps abreast of world news with her television tuned to Italian RAI T.V. programs, which plays in the background as she goes about her day.

In 1960 two years after Lina Tagliaferri and her family had departed from Wittenoom, Valentina Giannasi's husband, Bruno, had begun working in the Colonial mill,

⁴⁴ Thirty-two years after Beppe had arrived in Wittenoom.

⁴⁵ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁴⁶ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, October 2009.

⁴⁷ Interview with Lina Tagliaferri, Perth, November 2008.

⁴⁸ For a discussion on transnational care giving see Baldassar, L. (2007), 'Transnational Families and the provision of moral and emotional support: The relationship between truth and distance', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 14 (4), pp. 385-409.

built two years earlier. Exhaust and ventilation improvements would make no difference to the dust levels because maintenance of that equipment was not carried out regularly.⁴⁹ Bruno was no doubt familiar with the holes in the exhaust panels, patched with hessian bags. The holes and hessian bags were still there when ABC's Four Corners visited Wittenoom with Rolando Sabbadini, another ex-Italian miner, in 1988.⁵⁰

The Giannasi family returned to Perth at Easter in 1966. Bruno Giannasi, like Lina Tagliaferri's husband, Beppe, had developed asbestosis. Bruno's son, Alvaro, recalled his father's papers stated that he had a reduced lung capacity of 40 per cent, from working in the mill. Gradually the annual chest examinations at the Perth Chest Clinic would show a 70 - 80 per cent incapacitation. Like many other Wittenoom Italians, the Giannasis already owned their house in Perth. During an earlier visit to Perth, Bruno Giannasi had paid a deposit on the house, purchased for £ 2,000 [\$4,000]. His wife, Valentina, had been a careful money manager. She used the rent from their Wittenoom boarders to feed the family. Her husband's mill earnings — roughly \$80 a fortnight — had paid off the bank loan by the time of their arrival in Perth, four years after her arrival in Wittenoom in 1962.

Because of his poor state of health, Valentina took Bruno to the doctor's. The Italian doctor's remark, "He worked in the mine. What do you expect?", led Valentina Giannasi to seek another opinion. She found an Italian-speaking Australian doctor, Dr Robinson. "He took care", she recalled. Bruno had pneumonia and had to be admitted to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Dr. Robinson prescribed antibiotics.

His fingers were rotting... They gave him one injection.
After this the professor said to me that he has been lucky
because the injection we have given him has worked.

Because of his asbestosis symptoms, Bruno sometimes had no choice but to stay home from work. As his condition worsened, it became necessary to change employment. His son, Alvaro, recalled that Bruno always worked for Italians, as his father never learned to speak English very well. He found a labourer's job carrying cement bags, digging holes and pushing

⁴⁹ Motley Rice documents, Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10722. See the letters between Dr Jim McNulty (who had approached Rennie to approach CSR about the dusty conditions) and Dr Rennie.

⁵⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10252: Transcript of the Four Corners programme, '*Blue Murder*'. ABC journalist Paul Barry was accompanied by ex-Italian miner, Rolando Sabbadini, by then — as Barry explained — a successful Perth businessman. According to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board listing, Rolando Sabbadini passed away in 1997, at 62 years of age.

wheelbarrows. The heavy nature of the work caused his breathing problems to worsen. From there he went to Preston Timber in Osborne Park, run by his fellow townsman, Colli. A work accident, in which he cut off a number of fingers, prevented him from working for a considerable length of time. He left there when the dusty conditions finally proved too much. A friend found him a job cleaning railway wagons with the Western Australian Railways. Because of his worsening symptoms aggravated by the dusty conditions, Bruno had to give up work altogether. A social worker and Dr. Robinson helped the family to apply for compensation. Valentina remembers Bruno's boss coming to their home.

He couldn't breathe. So much so that the supervisor came home and said, "It's better that you tell your husband to stop working because (holding back tears) because he couldn't breathe". Ah well, (regains composure) and from there (sighs) he would get the compensation. Instead of offering us money, he preferred to get wages a fortnight... They would give him something that way and I worked. I have always worked.

Many of the men for whom Valentina had cooked and washed in Wittenoom sought her out when they came to Perth to live. "I said, 'No, not any more. I'll go to work but I don't want people in my home'."⁵¹ Her son, Alvaro, recalled that his mother had a hard life, working in and outside the home. Valentina worked two jobs. Her day job was in a chicken factory, where she had to put up with rough language. From there she went to her night job in a restaurant. Realizing Valentina's ability to cook, the restaurant owner sacked the chef, and installed her in his place. He paid Valentina less for the privilege. The owner was, however, never satisfied with her efforts. Her long hours of work meant Alvaro had to help out at home:

She used to work... from six in the morning... My Dad would go to work and drop her off and then he would go to work... She didn't get home until five, six. I know because after school, it was my job to water the garden, the plants, the flowers at the front and the vegies at the back... We had a pump but it didn't work... really slow, and the sprinkler was all rusted out so... I'd have to do them by hand.

Alvaro also helped out in other ways, including the completion of his parents and their friends' annual tax returns. Finally Valentina left the restaurant. Valentina's and Bruno's combined efforts meant that by 1971 they had saved enough money to visit Italy. Bruno's asbestosis symptoms were still tolerable at that time. Alvaro recalled his father

⁵¹ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

used to cough, cough and had probably had some discomfort. It was still early days and... he was still reasonably fit. At that time 1971, it wouldn't have been... So yes, he went back then.⁵²

Upon their return from Italy, Valentina left the chicken factory. A Calabrian friend recommended her for a position in the supermarket, *Tom the Cheap Grocer*, where her friend was already employed. As a young child, Valentina's father had understood the value of education and sent her to school. This meant she could read and write and work with figures, she explained. Despite having little English, she went from cooking the chickens to selling them. From there she went to work for Boans (now Myer). Here Valentina's ability to engage with customers was also recognized. She recalls a conversation she had with her boss, Mr. Palmer.

I said to the manager: Mr. Palmer, I don't have the language. He said: You are better than the Australians. You don't have to talk. You have to work (she is laughing as she recounts the story). You know how to work!" (still laughing) Because, you know, even on the counter... as long as you understand.

Valentina worked until her husband required constant care because of his deteriorating health. He died in 1988. It was around this time that a class action settled damages claims for some 300 Wittenoom victims. Valentina remembers her husband's passing and how they calculated their damages payment.

He was going to die. He was no longer able to dress, to wash. Alvaro [their son] said to me, "Mum, stop. Dad needs your help now" and so in 1984 I stopped working. However when Bruno died in 1988 they paid out, but he was dead. They didn't pay him because I left work to look after this man, but I had already gone part-time. I worked four hours to look after him. They calculated four years... what I was owed. I think they gave me about 40 thousand dollars... lost wages. (Angela: Which isn't very much.) No, but better than nothing. I had left work... given that if Bruno... because when you get to 65 the Insurance would give us... Alvaro said, "It's better if dad takes a bit at a time". (She laughs). Instead it would have been better, if he had taken it all because he died. He lost it. He lost it.⁵³

After Bruno's death, Valentina sold her home and moved into the unit where she has established a thriving garden. She continues to provide support for her family and her

⁵² Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, December 2008.

⁵³ Interview with Valentina Giannasi, Perth, October 2009.

grandchildren, who call in regularly to enjoy her company and Tuscan cooking, much to her delight.

While those with asbestosis were dealing with their gradually deteriorating health, ex-Wittenoom workers and residents were starting to develop symptoms of a more insidious disease about which they had never heard before — mesothelioma.

The Stealth of Mesothelioma

In the 1970s healthy people who had been to Wittenoom began developing respiratory and other symptoms, and dying within twelve months. They had been diagnosed with mesothelioma.⁵⁴ It was only as people witnessed the death of loved ones and friends from this disease that the further implications of having been at Wittenoom became evident. The thought of developing mesothelioma became overwhelming for ex-workers and their families. It impacted upon the mental health of some to the point that they refused to mix with fellow ex-workers to avoid any discussion about Wittenoom.⁵⁵ Several ex-workers turned to the courts for damages, as a result of their psychiatric injury, suffering from extreme depression, morbidity and anxiety symptoms.⁵⁶

From 1990 to 2007 a Vitamin A program — subsequently renamed ReVital — was funded by the Western Australian Department of Health. Wittenoom adults and children participated, in the hope that it would decrease their chances of developing cancer. That hope vanished when the researchers terminated the program. Their trials had determined there were no differences in the number of mesothelioma cases when a comparison was made between those who had been administered retinol or beta carotene, two forms of

⁵⁴ In 1962 Dr Jim McNulty published the first case of mesothelioma from the Wittenoom mine. See McNulty (1962), Op Cit. He would continue to advocate for the removal of asbestos tailings around Wittenoom and the closure of the mine. McNulty (1968), Op Cit. McNulty was tireless in maintaining his opposition to the mine and raising public awareness about the dangers associated with asbestos exposure throughout his long career in the W.A. Department of Health, including as Commissioner of Public Health. See Motley Rice documents, Plaintiff's exhibit no. 10722 which contains the Department of Health correspondence, much of which was initiated by Dr McNulty and includes letters to CSR consultant physician, Dr Rennie.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Napolitano, A. (2006), *Liborio: My great love: doomed by the scourge of asbestos* (Western Australia: Angela Napolitano).

⁵⁶ See, for example, *CSR Limited vs Della Maddalena* [2006] HCA 1, 2nd February 2006. P 36/2005. *Napolitano-vs-CSR Ltd & Midalco Pty Ltd* [1994], Supreme Court of Western Australia, 30 August. Case No: CIV1450/1994.

Vitamin A, instead of the placebo. There had also been concerns of overseas researchers about the side-effects of high doses of beta-carotene.⁵⁷ Several research participants, who had started on the Vitamin A program, would ultimately withdraw as they questioned its efficacy and the possible dangers to their health.

Mesothelioma has a long latency period; its onset is sudden, with no indication of whom it could strike. Mario Bonomi and Mario Tamburri's stories illustrate the stealth of this disease. Both families had worked very hard to establish a more secure future for their children. In 1982 life changed dramatically for both men and their families. Twenty years later, Michael Martino faced the consequences of having played in the asbestos tailings as a child.

In November 1961 Cecilia Bonomi, her husband, Mario and their three sons went to Perth. Mario, who worked in the Wittenoom mine, had sustained a serious back injury from a rock fall. He was hospitalized in a body cast for 12 months. In the meantime, Cecilia and their sons lived in their Bulwer Street home in North Perth. Once discharged from hospital, Mario worked for six months at the Perth City Council and later on at the Perry Lakes Stadium, built for the 1964 Commonwealth Games.

During a visit to the Oprandi family at their Bullsbrook farm in 1963, Mario and Cecilia Bonomi saw land nearby for sale. Impressed with what they saw, Mario and Cecilia sold their home in North Perth and moved to Bullsbrook. Similarly to the Oprandis, they would develop a viable dairy business on which to raise their four sons — their fourth son, Claudio, had been born after their return from Wittenoom. By 1980 Andrew, Luigi, Francesco and Claudio had taken over most responsibilities on the farm. Eldest son, Andrew explained

The old man virtually retired. We, the brothers, had taken over the whole operation. The old man was still doing as much work as he was doing before but basically... we signed the accounts. We did the work.

Two years later, on 13th December 1982, at 59 years of age Mario Bonomi was dead. Earlier in the year, Mario had become ill and had required hospitalization to remove liquid from his lungs. Andrew Bonomi described the progression of his father's illness:

I guess deep down he knew he was a candidate because all his mates around him were dying... He was diagnosed with diabetes... You know same old thing.....first.....he

⁵⁷ Occupational and Respiratory Epidemiology Group, convened by Dr Bill Musk. Perth, October 2009.

was taken to the doctor... finished up in hospital... come out two weeks... That changed his life style drastically.⁵⁸

Andrew had already witnessed the nature of asbestos-related disease during his adolescence. His booming voice had softened noticeably, as he now spoke about his father's death from mesothelioma.

Well, it might sound callous, but he was lucky... I've seen some of his mates. I was 17, 18, 19, 20. I would run him into town. 12.....18 months and they were just skin and bones. They were walking dead, really living dead. In a lot of ways he was fortunate. I remember one bloke. I was a kid... a monster of a man... I would have been 18, 19. He was at Fremantle. I took the old man down. He had been in that hospital for 18 months and his wife asked me to give her a hand to get him out of bed. I picked him up. He was sheer skin and bone and really all they did was torture him. That's what they did. Then the day the results... and I reckon the old man was lucky. He was fortunate — three months and he was gone.⁵⁹

Six months earlier, in May 1982, Rosa and Mario Tamburri's eldest daughter, Josphine, had married. During the three months she spent honeymooning in Italy her father became very ill. The stealth of mesothelioma had left Mario Tamburri with little time to live. Josephine arrived on July 20 and eight days later her father was dead. It had taken six weeks for the rarer peritoneal mesothelioma to manifest and take his life. Rosa remembers the course of her husband's illness:

The first operation on the 17[th]... then he had another one because was already blocked again... They just put a tube so the food would go down.....(Angela: the tumour was in his stomach?)... (softly) yeah, yeah... whatever he had and on the 17[th] that he had this tube put in... [on the] 24[th] ... that was blocked already... He was just crying. They gave him three months. "You have chemo... if you have this..." "How long you give me?" "Maybe nine months." He said, "What for? You got to go through all that problem for another 3 or 4 months"? He didn't have anything done: no chemo or radiation (these words were barely audible).

The pain of the loss is still carried by Rosa Tamburri and her daughters.

I was very... I'm still very upset... I was really upset... I felt I was cheated... my [youngest] daughter was only seven.....was upset....."Mum, why didn't I get to know my father?" What can I do? 1982... It's 27 years.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Interview with Andrew Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2010.

⁵⁹ Interview with Andrew Bonomi, Bullsbrook, October 2010.

⁶⁰ Interview with Rosa Tamburri, Perth, October 2009.

Mesothelioma did not only strike the workers. It eventually took the lives of their wives who washed their clothes and the children who had innocently played in the tailings, as Michael Martino had done as a three year old in 1963. He was the third of the five Martino children who were in Wittenoom: Rosemary (who died in Wittenoom in 1965), Susan, Michael, Julie and Noelle. The Martino family left Wittenoom in 1967, the year following the mine's closure. By the time he was 18 years of age Michael Martino was working as a motor mechanic and had met and fallen in love with Maria Italiano. They married a few years later. Maria shared with me how they enjoyed life, lived it to the full and built their dream home. They had three sons, Jayson, Daniel and Giordan. Yet in the back of Michael's mind, Maria recalled, he always carried the thought that he was a child of Wittenoom. If ever he contracted a chest infection, he always went to the doctor's. He even joined the Vitamin A program before his marriage. Maria explained

Mick was on it the whole time... so in his mind I think he thought he was probably safer than the person who wasn't on it... He tried to get both of his sisters and his dad was actually on Vitamin A... Sue and Julie didn't want to know, so they didn't go on it. So he felt he was a bit more protected because he was on this program.⁶¹

On 22nd June 2002, when their sons were 11, 9 and 4, 42 year-old Michael's worst fear was realized. He would undergo three different types of chemotherapy and finally participated in a clinical trial.

In 2002... June he got that sick and he was in absolutely agonizing pain... he could not bear it any more... I ended up putting him in the car... got him to the hospital... I picked up my mother-in-law and we went there... ummm (teary) that's when they said... "There's nothing we can do. We just have to make him comfortable."... He was there for a few days and then he wanted to come home... but he didn't even last half a day, so we took him back to the hospital and then they started... morphine, pain killers... (sighs) the first week... (sighs) ... Dr Musk called me in... I remember leaving him at the hospital and coming home and thinking... He's going to be okay. I had to pick the kids up from school... and I made him a special dinner... by the time I got back to the hospital there were all these people there... Dr Musk had been looking for me... "If Michael lasts five days... he probably won't last that long."... He actually lasted two weeks... but it was a terrible... the pain... he was yelling and screaming... He was on the highest dose of morphine they could give him... They were not allowed to give him anymore... and it wasn't enough... He just got worse and

⁶¹ Interview with Maria Martino, Perth, November 2010.

worse... He stopped talking... not eating... couldn't drink... his mouth was drying up... we were wetting his lips with icy poles... but he was in so much pain... and they kept saying to me... "It's probably the most aggressive cancer anyone could have."... I thought... you must be able to control this pain. But they just could not control this poor man's pain... His eyes had been closed for three days... He opened his eyes and he looked at me and he called out... (pleading) "Maria, help me." ... And then he just slowly got worse until (sighs) he was just laying in bed breathing... We were all at the hospital... The kids were at the hospital... We had a room upstairs and the last few nights we thought he was going to go so sitting by his bed... not sleeping... the next morning the sun rose and I thought I'll go upstairs and I'll just wash my hair... I needed to have a shower... I went upstairs and I thought... Nooooooooooooo... I think I'll go back downstairs... I said to the kids: "Come on. Let's go back downstairs." We got down there and it was like... the last person from the family had walked in the room and he just took his last breath.⁶²

I still recall Maria's words: "they just could not control this poor man's pain". Michael's three sons also carry pain. Maria concretized the reality for Jayson, Daniel and Giordan.

The kids have had to grow up going through school, leaving school, getting their licence, becoming men, finding jobs. The three boys are all like their dad — all mechanically-minded. We've had some times with anger. We've had fists through doors. We've had all sorts of things happen — just through anger of not having their father here to do those things that all their friends have got their fathers here to do with them.⁶³

Given the finality of their prognosis, asbestos victims have gone to court to seek damages to provide for surviving family members. Damages payments, however, do not quell the fear with which Wittenoom survivors live.

The Ticking Time Bomb

In the 21st century surviving Wittenoom workers, residents and those who have been exposed to asbestos-based products still face the possibility of developing mesothelioma.

A visit to the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia office in Western Australia reveals the extent of the impact of blue asbestos in the lives of ex-Wittenoom workers and their families. It also informs the visitor of what is to come in the future from environmental exposure. The Society has dedicated a room to Wittenoom. Copies of newspaper articles and photos of victims cover the walls. There are also colourful butterflies made from the x-ray

⁶² Interview with Maria, Jayson and Daniel Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁶³ Interview with Maria Martino, Perth, November 2010.

film of victims on the wall of the office of Rosemarie Vojakovic in remembrance of them (see figure 119).

For those dealing with their mesothelioma diagnosis, the Asbestos Diseases Society in Osborne Park is the place where they come for help to pursue damages claims to provide financially for their families after they have died. During my visits to the society in 2008, 2009 and 2010, the waiting room was always full of sombre-faced men and women waiting to talk with Robert Vojakovic — ADSA's president — his wife, Rosemarie, or one of the other staff members.⁶⁴ Many ex-Wittenoom workers and their families have sat in that waiting room. They have also attended the annual Ecumenical Church Service, held on the last Friday in November, to remember asbestos victims. They hear Robert Vojakovic report on the number of asbestos-related deaths in the preceding year. They have also gathered for the annual December picnic at Whiteman's Park, north of Perth — where I met several of the research participants.

The establishment of the ADSA in 1979 and these annual rituals are a response to the legacy of Wittenoom. The diseases and deaths due to blue asbestos exposure are the visible legacy, but the invisible legacy, 'the ticking time bomb', remains ever-present in the minds of the surviving ex-Wittenoom population. The disease's long latency period leaves the Wittenoom survivors with a question mark over their heads, as it must others who have experienced environmental exposure to the fibre. "Will I too develop mesothelioma?"⁶⁵

⁶⁴ For more information see Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc., Op Cit. or Website: <http://www.asbestosdiseases.org.au>

⁶⁵ For an example of environmental exposure go to <http://decisions.justice.wa.gov.au/supreme/supdcsn.nsf> for a recent Western Australian Court judgment 26/10/2011 see *Lowes vs AMACA PTY. LTD* (formerly James Hardie & Co Pty Ltd). During my time with Sue Ranieri in December 2010 she recounted a family friend, a painter by trade, who was ill because of his exposure to asbestos while working. The man had never been to Wittenoom.



Figure 119: Butterflies made from asbestos victims' x-rays in Rose Marie Vojakovic's office.

The slightest twinge of pain or contraction of a chest infection re-ignites the fear they would rather forget. Participants in this research, along with others I met by chance in Western Australia, and even some of my friends here in Melbourne, know of someone who has died or is about to die of mesothelioma.⁶⁶ They have witnessed the progression of the disease. Those with whom I have spoken express living with this knowledge in different ways.

Attilio Micheloni had returned to Italy in the 1990s. He told me, during my visit with him in November of 2008, that he was “full of dust”. Our time together was punctuated by his constant coughing, clearing of the throat and the depositing of his sputum into a handkerchief. A few months earlier he had been hospitalised because of severe breathing difficulties.

Tullio Rodigari had also returned to Italy in the late 1950s. As we drove through the Valtellina area me to meet two other ex-miners, he repeatedly told me that even though he was 80 years old, he felt as healthy as a 50 year old. He did not mention that all but four of thirteen of his *paesani* who went to Wittenoom have succumbed to asbestos-related disease.⁶⁷ I discovered this during the reading of a court transcript for the case of another of his *paesani* who lives in Perth.⁶⁸ Rodigari did mention he had warned his deceased *paesano* — asbestos victim, Wally Della Maddalena — about wearing a handkerchief in the mill, where Rodigari had worked as an electrician. I had found out about Wally’s passing not from Rodigari but from his brother, Arturo who had settled in Perth. Ezio Belintende, whom I met at the house of Tullio Rodigari, told me that he was in good health. He said little about the health consequences of asbestos exposure, apart from not knowing about the risks when he worked there.

In Western Australia, my conversation with another ex-Wittenoom miner was also interrupted regularly by his need to cough. Speaking about his deceased Wittenoom friends became too difficult and we had to end our conversation. Giulio Santini too carries the sobering reminder of a friend who had passed away from an asbestos-related disease three

⁶⁶ Three of my friends told me of family members in Melbourne who have died from mesothelioma, as a result of exposure to asbestos in their jobs.

⁶⁷ I have met all four of those men during the course of my fieldwork: Arturo Della Maddalena (Perth), Attilio Micheloni (Ponte in Valtellina, Lombardy), Ezio Belintende (Sondrio, Lombardy) and Tullio Rodigari (Montagna in Valtellina).

⁶⁸ CSR Limited vs Della Maddalena [2006] HCA 1 2nd February, 2006, P 36/2005, p. 5.

weeks before I visited him in 2009. He explained about his annual checkups; one of the few among the fieldwork participants to mention it.

See, it's in me... and... I haven't got asbestos.....but I got scars of asbestos... on my left lung... which... supposed to revive after thirty years... Now... it's forty-six years... and I'm perfect, so that mean it's got no affect on my body... you know... my body rejected it.⁶⁹

Arturo Della Maddalena stopped work at 52 years of age. He explained to me that he could no longer work without suffering breathing problems. Similarly to the late Liborio Napolitano, Arturo lives with anxiety and depression as a result of his witnessing several friends die a painful death from mesothelioma and other asbestos-related conditions [including his brother Walter]. By the late 1990s there were “at least” twenty friends whom he had visited in hospital and who suffered from diseases related to asbestos exposure. I only found this out while reading Arturo's court judgment.⁷⁰

In October 2009 I met Lea Guagnin for the first of my several visits over two years. It was not long after her check-up at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Now in her eighties, her breathing difficulties, along with her gentle humour constantly underscored our conversations, as we shared the tiny muffins she had bought specially for our afternoon teas together. She made no mention of her health.

Some did not talk about illness even if they had lost loved ones to an asbestos-related disease. There are also those who are philosophical, speaking about death as part of the cycle of life and, therefore, death's inevitably. This tended to be the stance of some of the parents, now in their late 70s and 80s. Their concerns are not for themselves so much as for their children. One parent voiced the guilt which many parents who took their children most likely harbor, despite never having been warned of the dangers.

What I would like today? What can I say? They say “*Quello che è passato, è passato. Ormai non si può più tornare indietro. Vero?*”⁷¹ And what I would only like that — I have always thought, you know that [what if] something happens to my children? (She is very emotional at this point and can no longer speak. My memory is that the tears were welling up in her eyes.) And all these years that are passing — every time that my daughter...says (tears) “I don't feel well”. I am afraid.

⁶⁹ Interview with Giulio Santini, Perth, October 2009.

⁷⁰ CSR Limited vs Della Maddalena [2006] HCA 1 2nd February, 2006, P 36/2005, p. 4.

⁷¹ What is passed, is passed. You can't go back, can you?

I am afraid. I am afraid of this *male* [illness]. You know, because I took them up there.

Alvaro Giannasi verbalizes the fear with which all Wittenoom residents live, but upon which they do not dwell.

Should I be taken out by the same disease which is a strong possibility; that's on the back of my mind; that's a fear I've always got. I go on with my life. Don't sort of dwell on it but there are so many things that remind me of it all the time. That it's in the back of my mind that one day I'll get a pain somewhere and I'll go to the bloody doctor and then I'll have a test and I come up with this... or my mother or my sister. That's there all the time.

Among Wittenoom survivors who participated in this research, despite the sacrifices, challenges and loss of loved ones to asbestos-related diseases, like Alvaro Giannasi most express no rancour for the place, Wittenoom. Maria Detoni, Alvaro Giannasi and his mother, Valentina, have returned there in recent years to reacquaint themselves with the place where they spent their early days in Australia. When I asked Alvaro Giannasi to share what his father thought of his time at Wittenoom, he explained that his father held no regrets. He had made many friends there, something commented on by many of the men and women. However, Alvaro explains the feelings of loss: his and those of his children.

It became very hurtful when he died. Wittenoom in taking this away... that the place in which I had my most memorable time as a person growing up... Michael, [Alvaro's son] was the first born. He was around when dad passed away. I would miss him continuously every time I saw an old person with a grandchild. I would for months forget about it. But for the first few years I would choke and always I would think about the grandfathers who I knew that were grandfathers, who had grandchildren - they had nothing to do with them. My father did. He would come down in the last year before he died. He was crook, but he would come down... every day and visit Michael. They would sit in his car together. Mum was inside. And they would sit in his car and he'd hold him there and probably tell him stories - things like that I find I resent.⁷²

Several participants recounted the loss of parents and siblings during their childhood in Italy. The philosophical approach to death of the older Wittenoom Italians is possibly rooted in these earlier experiences and now as adults with considerably more life experience these underscore their acceptance of death's inevitability, despite having witnessed those of family and friends. More importantly, as result of their sacrifices and hard work they had been

⁷² Interview with Alvaro Giannasi, Perth, September 2009.

able to achieve a better future for themselves and their families. Many — despite their deaths due to an ARD — have lived longer, in comparison to their parents' shorter life spans, as Francesco and Emilia Oprandi pointed out.

Francesco: my father's parents were dead before they hit 35. So, if he died at 55 from something he probably thought
Emilia: I'm doing well.

They also offered the following observations about their family's friends, the Bonomi brothers' acceptance of their impending deaths. Francesco recalled:

I know the Bonomis and I talked to them when they were dying. I went to visit them in the last week but neither (Emilia: no...) of them said anything about they "duded" me. They were dying from something they had caught working and they — what Millie was saying — they had a house, they had a farm, the kids had jobs... In terms of money... they were comfortable... alright they were dying in their 50s but

Emilia continued:

Mario Bonomi had been a prisoner of war. That was probably worse for him. He used to talk about that... He was very bitter that he had been a prisoner of war but he was never bitter about... [Wittenoom] He was philosophical.

Francesco Oprandi offers one last observation about the Bonomi brothers' attitude to life and how those around them accepted their deaths.

They weren't bitter. So they didn't pass that on to their family, the people around them... We just think that it was sad that they died the way they did. And it would have been better if they hadn't... but in a way they were happy... I mean both of the Bonomis went back two or three times.....four.....Beppe did [to Italy]... I think Mario went back at least once, maybe twice... They had their father come out [from Italy]... They paid for him... He stayed here a year or so... So they sort of in the end enjoyed... The kids are all happy.....married.⁷³

Nevertheless, some also asked the question, why those responsible for Australia's worst industrial disaster should not be made accountable for their actions? In 2011 a friend of mine, Emilio Baldi, informed me of a court case in Turin, Italy, involving the two aging former owners of the European Eternit Corporation which had exposed thousands to asbestos. They were being held accountable:

⁷³ Interview with Francesco and Emilia Oprandi, Perth, October 2009.

Judge Raffaello Guariniello's wide-ranging investigations unearthed 2,696 cases – over 2,200 deaths and some 700 cancer sufferers... This case was one of the hardest to put together. The Swiss National Accident Insurance Organization (SUVA) long refused to pass on the case files. It took a Swiss court order to force SUVA to hand over the information. The investigation has indicted Stephan Schmidheiny and the Belgian baron Cartier de Marchienne on charges. Stephan Schmidheiny comes from a family prominent in Swiss economic and political circles. For almost a century his family was the biggest shareholder in Eternit... Baron de Cartier de Marchienne is a doyen of the Belgian economic establishment who held executive responsibility in the Belgian branch of Eternit (subsequently renamed Etex.)⁷⁴

On 13th February 2012 both were sentenced in absentia to 16 years gaol. They were found guilty of causing an environmental disaster and failing to comply with safety regulations.⁷⁵

After the success of the class action (in 1989) against CSR for damages claims payable to Wittenoom victims, the legal firm Slater and Gordon pursued the possibility of CSR executives being held accountable for their role in the deaths of Wittenoom workers. John Gordon, one of the victims' lawyers, explained to me when I asked him about

holding CSR accountable for their actions:

The prosecution of CSR officers was a decision for the Crown Prosecutor's Office, possibly on referral from the Attorney General. We certainly raised it and urged it, but there was little interest because the events had taken place so long ago and the chances of successfully prosecuting for any offences then available under the W.A. Criminal Code they regarded as remote. We were so totally occupied as a priority with getting compensation for people — and you will recall how hard it was just getting a negligence claim to stick, that we had no capacity to do any more.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Occupational and environmental exposure to blue asbestos has impacted dramatically on the lives of many of the Wittenoom population, as well as their surviving family and friends who have witnessed their deaths from asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. In view of mesothelioma's long latency period Wittenoom survivors and

⁷⁴ Vogel, Laurent (2009), 'Asbestos', *Hesa Newsletter of the European Trade Union Institute*, 35, 16-21.

⁷⁵ Peacock, M. (2012) <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-2-14/billionaire-baron-get-16-years-for-asbestos-deaths>.

⁷⁶ Email I received from John Gordon, 4th May 2011.

others who have been environmentally exposed to blue asbestos live with the fear that they too could develop that disease.

The high mortality rates in the Wittenoom cohort and the prediction of more asbestos-related deaths among survivors, at least until 2030, confirm that the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine is Australia's worst industrial disaster. Furthermore long after the deaths of the last of the Wittenoom residents, mortalities will continue as a result of environmental exposure to Wittenoom's blue asbestos, if the fibre is disturbed. The fibre is still present in many private homes and public buildings constructed with materials using asbestos as an additive or in the manufacture of an array of other products.

Chapter 9 - Reasons for the Legacy: Disregard of the Medical Knowledge, Pursuit of Profit and CSR's Secret Defence Strategy

Nothing's as precious as a hole in the ground.¹

Unfortunately the latest inspection of the mine and mill of Australian Blue Asbestos suggests that I may have been too sanguine in my last letter. The Mines Department Inspector reported to me that the mill was dirtier than ever. Despite a reduced ore production from the mine, a higher rate of fibre extraction has been achieved at the expense of higher dust concentrations. It is to be wondered that this cynical attitude towards their workers' health makes me doubt the company's good faith.²

Throughout the twentieth century, scientific knowledge became progressively available to CSR and the Western Australian Departments of Mines and Health on the three major asbestos-related diseases: asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. Prior to CSR's acquisition of the Wittenoom mine in 1943, two of these three diseases, asbestosis and lung cancer, had already been identified. In 1930 English researchers Merewether and Price had published their report on asbestosis. By the 1940s lung cancer due to asbestos exposure was being discussed in articles and editorials appearing in widely read medical journals.³

The Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits reveal CSR and the Department of Mines held a contrary position to the Department of Health regarding workers' health. The Department of Health communicated regularly with both parties about the hazardous conditions in the mine and mill at Wittenoom: with the Department of Mines in an attempt to have the Mines Act properly enforced (given that miners' health was the Department of Mines' responsibility), and with CSR to encourage the company to carry out the improvements outlined by Mines Inspectors. Despite the many representations the Department of Health made about the health dangers associated with the high dust levels and the growing number of asbestosis

¹ Midnight Oil (1990), 'Blue Sky Mine'; from the album Blue Sky Mining, produced by Warne Livesey and Midnight Oil, CBS/Columbia Records.

² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10673: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr Rennie [CSR consultant]. 6 February 1963. Re: The mill at ABA the Mines Department Inspector report to me that the mill was dirtier than ever, despite a reduced ore production.

³ Castleman, Op Cit. Chapters 1 & 2.

cases, A.B.A. Limited continued to operate Wittenoom in the pursuit of profit, under CSR's instructions and with the Department of Mines' support. By the early 1960s, the first case of mesothelioma was reported at Wittenoom and two international papers on mesothelioma had been published.

In the 1970s, the Australian media began reporting on Wittenoom and the cases of asbestos-related disease and deaths. During the same period, CSR secretly attended to the issue of their legal liability regarding future damages claims arising from ARDs. They succeeded, until an anonymous informant revealed CSR's clandestine defence to the journalist Michael Gill in 1988. This paved the way for the successful class action for damages claims by 300 asbestos victims. Claims continue to this day. In 2010, the issue of payment of damages claims resurfaced when CSR advised its intention to sell its sugar interest, Sucrogen. With the announcement of the sale to Wilmar, a Singaporean company, CSR provided assurances that it would continue to accept its responsibilities regarding asbestos liabilities and maintain a capital structure to support its future obligations.

Emerging Asbestos Knowledge and Efforts to Safeguard Wittenoom Workers

Within twenty years of the advent of asbestos mining in the late 1800s, health concerns for workers' exposed to asbestos began to be voiced internationally.⁴

By 1922 Australia's Commonwealth Department of Health had listed asbestos as a hazardous fibre in industry.⁵ In the U.S., working with asbestos was considered a risk of employment as early as 1929. In defending asbestos damages claims, North American asbestos company Johns-Manville argued that workers should have known about its dangers.⁶ In the 1930s the Germans, Italians, British and Americans were investigating the effects of asbestos exposure on factory workers.⁷ In 1932, two years after the publication in

⁴ Castleman, Op Cit. Chapter 1.

⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10651.00: Dr. D.G. Robertson (1922), 'An Index to Health Hazards in Industry', in Department of Health (ed.): Commonwealth of Australia.

⁶ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. p. 49.

⁷ For a detailed account of the research literature on asbestos-related diseases see Castleman, Op Cit. For the study undertaken in four asbestos textile factories in Italy in the 1930s see Vigliani, Op Cit. and Merler, E. (1998), 'A Cross-Sectional Study of Asbestos Workers Carried Out in Italy in 1940: A Forgotten Study', *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 33, pp. 90-93.

England of the Merewether and Price report on the effects of asbestos exposure, the *Australian Medical Journal* published a paper on "Pulmonary Asbestosis", which noted that "Cessation of exposure to the dust is of no avail in checking the spread of the disease process".⁸ What may have been the first reporting of the effects of asbestos exposure in Western Australia occurred in 1935. A Department of Labour inspector informed the Chief Inspector of Factories that four workers were suffering from the effects of asbestos exposure, with one needing lengthy hospitalization. The men worked in the Perth suburb of Rivervale, at James Hardie's factory which manufactured asbestos sheets and pipes. The Chief Inspector compared the Hardie's workplace scenario and the workers' symptoms to those described in the 1930 Merewether report. He sought advice from the Commissioner of Public Health regarding who should conduct the medical examinations and on the matter of workers' compensation for the affected workers.⁹

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, CSR, A.B.A. Limited and Western Australian Departments of Mines and Health documents reveal the recurrent discussions on the hazards of asbestos.¹⁰ These documents outline the knowledge available to CSR/ABA Limited senior executives and the Department of Mines on the hazards of asbestos and the health warnings and predictions of worker ill-health delivered by the Department of Health; the extent of the dusty conditions in the Wittenoom mine and the mill and ineffectual ventilation and exhaust systems highlighted in the Mines Inspectors' reports; the improvements considered necessary to safeguard workers' health recommended by Mines Inspectors and the Department of Health doctors; and CSR's monitoring of industrial disease

⁸ Merewether & Price, Op Cit. Merewether provided a detailed description of the gradual development of asbestosis (p. 9) and concluded from his data (p.13) that "fibrosis of the lungs is a definite occupational risk among asbestos workers... that the risk falls most heavily on those longest employed and on those engaged in the more dusty processes...the fibrosis will result from exposure for a period of time varying with concentration of dust in the air breathed." Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10907.00: Sparks, J.V. (1932), 'Pulmonary Asbestosis', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, (March), p. 338 (Abstract).

⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10653: Public Health Department file, 93/33. Workers' Compensation Act: Dangerous Industrial Processes and Diseases Arising Therefrom.

¹⁰ The documents were supplied by North Carolina lawyer, Motley Rice. He had obtained them during legal discovery.

at Wittenoom.¹¹ In taking the decision to immigrate to Australia and work at the Wittenoom asbestos mine in the 1950s and 1960s, neither the workers nor their families had any idea of the consequences of asbestos exposure, either in Australia or in their home country. None of the Italian research participants recall CSR/ABA Limited warning them of the health risks.

In 1943 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited (CSR) had added its name to the list of western corporations operating asbestos mines to supply the fibre for their manufacturing businesses.¹² That same year, to address its lack of mining expertise, the CSR library acquired or ordered journals, magazines and textbooks on engineering, mineralogy, asbestos, equipment and mining practices from the U.S., Canada, South Africa and also locally in Australia.¹³ Given the size of the company's Scientific and Technical Library, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company most likely held the 1922 *Australian Index to Health Hazards in Industry* which listed asbestos as hazardous, and the 1930 Merewether report on asbestosis. In recognition of its significant holdings, CSR was listed in the *Catalogue of the Scientific and Technical Periodicals in the Libraries of Australia* in the 1930s, and subsequently appeared in the *Annual Report of the Australian Institute of Librarians* of 1949 and the *Library Association Quarterly* of 1959, in which it was noted:

The library of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company founded in 1928... covers the fields of pure and applied science and technology. As the interests of this company have developed... so the library has progressively expanded. It provides information for the members of the CSR organization at the mills and refineries and to the subsidiary companies.¹⁴

Scientific knowledge about asbestosis and lung cancer due to asbestos exposure had been established in the medical literature prior to 1943, yet CSR would ignore the health consequences for its workers.¹⁵ In 1944, the visit to Wittenoom and the nearby asbestos

¹¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: includes the reports and correspondence exchanged between these various players in the 1950s and 1960s. It was compiled by Dr Jim McNulty who by the 1970s had become the Commissioner for Public Health in Western Australia.

¹² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10206: Sales Agreement of Mining Tenements from L.G. Hancock, E.J.T. Warren and E.A.M. Wright to Australian Blue Asbestos Limited dated 10 April 1943.

¹³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10119.00: list of books on mining, asbestos and related topics, drawn up by the CSR Library 3 June 1943.

¹⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10711: The Catalogue of the Scientific and Technical Periodicals in the Libraries of Australia, 1930; Exhibit no.10712: The Australian Institute of Librarians, Ninth Annual Report, October 1946, Melbourne University Press, 1947; Exhibit no. 10714: the Quarterly published by the Library Association of Australia, vol 8, April 1959.

¹⁵ See Castleman (1996), Asbestos, pp. 1–47, 49–158.

mine in Yampire Gorge by the Wittenoom manager Broadhurst, accompanied by K. O. Brown and Lang Hancock, highlighted CSR's attitude regarding acceptable working conditions.¹⁶ During this visit, K. O. Brown, the then Chief Engineer in CSR's Building Materials Division, had witnessed first-hand the dusty conditions in asbestos mining.¹⁷ In 1949 Brown was appointed an ABA Ltd director and by 1952 had become Managing Director of the Building Materials Division subsidiary companies and was living in Sydney. He displayed no concern for workers. Brown's report to CSR described conditions at Yampire Gorge and Wittenoom. They were "very dusty when operating but no more so than ours [at Wittenoom] is at present".¹⁸ He noted the Yampire Gorge manager's opinion (and most probably concurred) that the payment of a 5/- [50 cents] dust allowance to workers at the Yampire Gorge operation was a bad precedent.¹⁹ Brown's summation of the dust conditions in 1944 contradicted his evidence in the 1988 Heys and Barrow trial when he stated "he hadn't thought that the mine was dusty, because it didn't fog up his glasses when he walked through..."²⁰ In 1945 C. Adams, the Inspector of Mines stationed in Cue, reported on the dust menace in Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer:

A major consideration is the dust menace, and when the air in the gorge is stagnant, and the plant is in operation the conditions are simply appalling. These conditions were experienced... within the period of my visit, causing... dust to hang in the gorge... a quarter of a mile either side of the plant, and yet the men assure me that conditions have improved since my last visit... In general, the elimination of dust has been treated as an afterthought... The mill is a very poor affair in which everything has been mistakenly sacrificed in the name of production. The output could be greatly improved, at the

¹⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10131: K.O. Brown's report to CSR of inspection of Yampire Gorge asbestos mine, 1st December 1944. In the 1970s, Brown and Broadhurst were senior executives in the CSR hierarchy when the implications of asbestos exposure at Wittenoom entered the public domain.

¹⁷ See Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 378. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibits no: 10095: List of ABA Company directors, 27 December 1949; Exhibit no. 10887: Marrero Plant News Bulletin, Johns-Manville factory, 6/5/1959; no. 10241: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 to 16 July 1958) concerning the Wittenoom Asbestos venture. See 9 January 1952 minute. K.O. Brown had become Managing Director of all the Building Materials Division Subsidiary companies and Malcolm King, a director in all of them.

¹⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10131: K.O. Brown's report to CSR of inspection of Yampire Gorge asbestos mine. 1 December 1944.

¹⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10131: K.O. Brown's report to CSR of inspection of Yampire Gorge asbestos mine. 1 December 1944.

²⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10251: In the Supreme Court of Western Australia. Heard 19 November 1987 to 14 July 1988. Delivered 4 August 1988. No. 1148 of 1987 BETWEEN STEPHEN EDWARD JAMES TIMOTHY CHARLES IRVIN BARROW, Plaintiff and CSR LIMITED, first defendant and MIDALCO PTY LTD, second defendant and no. 1161 of 1987 BETWEEN PETER HEYS, Plaintiff and CSR LIMITED, first defendant and MIDALCO PTY LTD, second defendant (By original action) and BETWEEN CLAYTON PETER HEYS, as Administrator with the will annexed of the estate of PETER HEYS deceased. Hills, Op Cit. p. 122.

cost of temporary loss of production... Owing to faults in design and poor machinery, this plant will probably never be made to produce continuously, at or near the theoretical maximum output.²¹

In 1946 correspondence between CSR and its subsidiary, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, indicates they were aware of asbestosis. The information had most likely been obtained from the CSR library.²² It may explain why Broadhurst's correspondence to his Managing Director mentioned the development of asbestosis in the mill manager, Dignam, without needing to spell out the nature of the illness. The company's attitude to worker health and mining diseases is, once again, implicit in Broadhurst's failure to raise any concern for Dignam's ill-health. Instead Broadhurst asked: "Who would replace him?"²³ In the 1980s, Broadhurst would die from mesothelioma.²⁴

In January 1948, a report on the properties of asbestos had been prepared for the Commissioner of Public Health in Perth. It stated: "Asbestos[is] is a recognized condition according to a number of authorities and fine dust if present in the atmosphere in sufficient quantity under working conditions could constitute a hazard if not properly controlled."²⁵ A month later, concern about the dust hazard at Wittenoom led Western Australian Health Department doctors to approach Department of Mines' officials and ABA Limited regarding who had responsibility for the supervision of asbestos workers' health. Acting Commissioner of Public Health, Dr Kingsbury, wrote to the Senior Commonwealth Medical Officer, Dr Murray, to query if his staff periodically examined Wittenoom workers.²⁶ Murray informed the Commissioner that the Department of Mines decided which areas the mobile x-ray unit visited, with Wittenoom Gorge to be visited every second year.²⁷ By mid February, Dr Linley Henzell, Director of the Tuberculosis Branch, had written to the Acting Commissioner of

²¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10571: 24 October 1945. C. Adams, Inspector of Mines (Cue) writes to the State Mining Engineer.

²² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10231: C. H. Broadhurst's letter to the Managing Director, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, 6 September 1946. Topic: Mine Staff.

²³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10231: Wittenoom Mine Manager C. H. Broadhurst's letter to the Managing Director, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, 6 September 1946. Topic: Mine Staff.

²⁴ Hills, Op Cit. p. 122.

²⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 162, Report on asbestos prepared by the Government Chemical Laboratories for the Commissioner of Public Health of Western Australia, January 1948.

²⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 160, Letter from Acting Commissioner of Public Health to Senior Commonwealth Medical Officer, W.A. 13 February 1948.

²⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 159, Letter to Acting Commissioner of Public Health from Senior Commonwealth Medical Officer, W.A., 16 February 1948.

Public Health, reiterating the Commonwealth Laboratory's responsibility for the health of the Wittenoom miners. He also noted that Wittenoom's asbestos was being used in the manufacture of fibrolite for building purposes in the Perth metropolitan area.²⁸

By May ABA Limited entered discussions with Dr Henzell to conduct x-rays for workers going to Wittenoom. Their concern was not over workers' health, but to satisfy the Mines Department requirement of "a certificate equivalent to that given by the Commonwealth Laboratories at Kalgoorlie". So that miners were covered under the Miner's Relief Act, by the 1st June Dr Henzell had raised the matter of routine medical examinations for prospective Wittenoom workers with Mr Foxall, the State Mining Engineer, and Mr Telfer, the Under Secretary for Mines. As a result of those discussions, Henzell informed the Commissioner of Public Health that he would put in a formal application for his branch to conduct medicals. Not even a week later, Dr Eric Saint, the Flying Doctor stationed at Port Hedland, also voiced his concerns about the health of Wittenoom workers to the Commissioner. Clearly, little had changed since Mines Inspector Adams's report in 1945. Saint spoke of the shocking conditions in the Wittenoom mine and at the hospital with its inadequate x-ray equipment. He also declared his now famous prediction:

I've an eye on the future – the asbestos mine at Wittenoom... operates without any sort of dust extractor whatsoever; and since the incubation period of asbestos is so much less... in a year or two ABA will produce the richest and most lethal crop of cases of asbestosis in the world's literature.²⁹

Despite Saint's concerns, the Commissioner did little more to monitor the Wittenoom Gorge workers' health effectively than to confirm that

arrangements have just been concluded to have all these men x-rayed before they leave Perth or Kalgoorlie to commence work in Wittenoom Gorge... Efforts are being made to make this an annual event if it can be managed. Your comments on the "incubation period" of asbestosis are interesting, and it is recognised that these workers could easily incur a greater hazard than do workers in our goldmines. When I am up your way again I would like to discuss this matter with you on the spot.³⁰

²⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 161, Memo from Dr Linley Henzell, Director of Tuberculosis Branch to the Commissioner of Public Health, 3 February 1948.

²⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10313: Letter from Dr Saint to Dr Cook, Commissioner of Public Health, 6 June 1948.

³⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10881: Commissioner of Public Health replies to Dr Saint's letter, 16 June 1948.

By July Dr Henzell was reporting on x-rays of asbestos workers at the Perth Chest Clinic: three were normal, one needed to return for an x-ray in 12 months and another was advised to present for a medical examination, as he required further investigation.³¹ The need for improved conditions at Wittenoom prompted the Minister for Health's representations to the Minister for Mines and the Minister for Labour. The Minister for Mines questioned Dr Saint's view of the conditions at Wittenoom but failed to address the possibility of workers developing asbestosis.

Dr Saint of Port Hedland has been misinformed as regards precautions taken at the asbestos works at Wittenoom Gorge as the Mines Regulation Act is strictly enforced and all employees are thoroughly examined and hold a certificate that they are free of T.B. before they can be employed in or about the asbestos works.³²

The Minister for Labour passed on the Minister for Health's request to the Chief Inspector of Factories with a view to extend the jurisdiction of the Factories and Shops Act to Wittenoom as a way to improve conditions there. The Chief Inspector viewed the request favourably. He arranged a proclamation to be put up, only to have it fail when the Solicitor General pointed out that mines and collieries did not come under that Act.³³

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the tone of the reports the Minister for Health received on conditions at Wittenoom reflected their provenance and the semblance of efficiency they wished to convey. Those from the Minister for Mines were often benign: his Secretary of Mines reporting that their Mines Inspectors "were carefully watching the dust position at the Mill".³⁴ At other times, probably wishing to be seen as enforcing the Mines Act and in view of the unacceptable conditions, the Minister for Mines reported to the Minister for Health on the recommended improvements his Inspectors had made to ABA Limited.³⁵

³¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 151, Dr Henzell reports to the Commissioner of Public Health, on x-rays, 26 July 1948.

³² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 141, Memo from the Minister for Mines to Minister for Health, December 1949.

³³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 142, Copy to the Minister of Health from the Minister for Labour of Memo from the Secretary of Labour to the Minister for Labour regarding extending operations of the Factories and Shops Act, 20 December 1949.

³⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10223: Memo from the Secretary of Mines to the Minister of Mines, 7 February 1950.

³⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide 134, The State Mining Engineer's letter to the Secretary of Mines regarding an inspector's recommendations for improvements at Wittenoom, 1 March 1950.

Meanwhile, Department of Health doctors, such as Dr Linley Henzell who had visited Wittenoom, continued to voice concern for the workers' health:

The whole of the surroundings... were smothered with the dust which is produced in the treatment... very few, if any, precautions were taken. Asbestos dust if inhaled constitutes a very grave risk and is, if anything, worse than silicosis.³⁶

In addition to the already published international research literature, Australian research began to appear regarding asbestos and dust hazards. In November 1950 *The Medical Journal of Australia* published "The Occupational Factors in Pulmonary Dust Disease". The article discussed asbestosis and the high rate of lung cancer among workers in several industries. It also outlined preventive measures.³⁷

The Department of Health's concern for Wittenoom workers' health dominated its correspondence with the Department of Mines. No one person, however, was taking responsibility for dealing regularly with their x-ray results, until the arrival from Ireland of Dr Jim McNulty in 1957. He had been appointed Chest Physician with the State Tuberculosis Control Branch in Kalgoorlie to control TB in the miners and town residents. He replaced Dr Gordon Oxer, District Medical Officer and the Kalgoorlie hospital's Superintendent. From Kalgoorlie, Oxer, an ex-Changi POW, went to Wittenoom as the town's doctor. There he would gain a reputation for his exploration activities and interest in the history of the Wittenoom area.³⁸ Where previously responsibility for the Mobile Unit x-rays had been unclear, this changed with McNulty's appointment. He followed up suspicious x-ray changes with sputum tests for suspected TB.³⁹

McNulty also researched the literature on asbestos-related diseases. He had frequent exchanges with the Department of Mines and A.B.A. Limited regarding the dust hazard and

³⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10314: Memo from Dr. Linley Henzell to the Minister for Health, 20 February 1950.

³⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10660: *The Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 11, 37th Year, 25 November 1950.

³⁸ Oxer is mentioned in the Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibits no.10386 & 10668: Letters from Wittenoom mine manager, O. Allan to 1. General Superintendent Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Perth 2. Managing Director Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Sydney. Both dated 24 June 1960. That he was a Changi POW came up during my conversations with Tony Martino, Perth, November 2010. His interest in exploring the local area also emerged in discussion with Tony Martino. This is confirmed in Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: the ABA Story, (1963) Chapter 1.

³⁹ Interview conducted by Criena Fitzgerald with Dr Jim McNulty, Perth, November 2002.

the improvements needed in the mine and the mill to safeguard worker health.⁴⁰ The differences of opinion and delays in taking decisions inherent in such discussions were capitalized upon by the company. The inconclusiveness of discussions was exacerbated by what Dr Jim McNulty defined as the fatalistic attitude of the State Mining Engineer. The mine management refused to address, ignored or took their time in considering McNulty's advice on what he had learned from the British and American experiences.⁴¹

As the annual x-rays and medical examinations identified workers with asbestosis, sufferers were advised to leave Wittenoom.⁴² In 1958 McNulty's examination of the Wittenoom x-rays had resulted in the diagnosis of five new cases of asbestosis. Dissatisfied with the approach of the examining doctor, the following year McNulty made his first of several visits to the mining town. Medical examinations proved difficult due to the lack of or minimal English among the men. That the workers were developing asbestosis was not new, either to the operating company, ABA Limited, or the medical research.⁴³ McNulty's findings revealed "the length of exposure of men contracting asbestosis or silicosis was much shorter than comparably employed men in the gold mining industry [who developed silicosis]".⁴⁴ The workers average exposure to dust was four years.⁴⁵ In 1958 — just as Dr Saint had predicted ten years earlier — the Professor of Pathology at Perth Hospital, R. E. J. ten Seldan, warned that the number of asbestosis and, now also, carcinoma cases among Wittenoom workers would increase in the next ten years.⁴⁶ Later that year the matter of asbestos-related diseases at Wittenoom was raised in Western Australia's Legislative Assembly. The company was clearly monitoring any public discussion regarding asbestos-related diseases

⁴⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: Dr Jim McNulty's Health Department file contains the extensive correspondence which was exchanged regarding the health issues among Wittenoom workers.

⁴¹ In time the research literature would suggest that the amount of exposure was not the significant factor, it was rather that you had been exposed. See Castleman, *Op Cit.* p. 128. Cumpston, A. C. (1978), 'The Health Hazard at Wittenoom', in Division of Occupational Health: Clean Air Noise Abatement in Department of Public Health of Western Australia.

⁴² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10325: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr D. D. Letham re asbestosis and x-ray classifications in Wittenoom workers, 29 January 1959.

⁴³ See Castleman, *Op Cit.*

⁴⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10327: Dr Jim McNulty writing to Dr King, 13 January 1960.

⁴⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10328: Dr McNulty Chest Physician and Mines Medical Officer writing to General Manager State Government Insurance Office (Western Australia) 17 March 1960.

⁴⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 102, Professor of Pathology, R. E. J. ten Seldan, at Perth Hospital is writing to the Health Commissioner of Public Health, Dr Henzell about his concerns. 18 April 1958.

at their mine. Broadhurst, now a director of ABA Limited, sent a copy of the questions and answers given in the parliament to ABA Limited's Managing Director, K. O. Brown.⁴⁷

In 1960 Dr McNulty's report on asbestos diseases in Wittenoom was presented to the Western Australian parliament, where his findings were not discussed.⁴⁸ Due to the high levels of dust exposure there was a 12 per cent rate of asbestosis among Wittenoom's asbestos miners and millers, with workers developing the disease at a faster rate than previously reported in the research literature. Compared with the statistics in the gold mining industry, where one per cent of workers developed silicosis from exposure to silica dust common in coal and gold mining, the asbestosis statistics were disturbing.⁴⁹ Dr Linley Henzell, by then the Commissioner of Public Health, supplied this information to his minister.⁵⁰ The Minister for Health, in turn, informed the Minister for Mines of the number of asbestosis cases. The Minister for Mines informed Henzell — via the Minister for Health, an indication that discussions were taking place at highest levels of government — that health in the mining industry was none of his business. McNulty explained in 2002 that the role of the Department of Health, as far as the Department of Mines was concerned, was “to do the medical examinations and the x-rays and report to the Minister of Mines. End of story”. McNulty, eventually to become the Commissioner of Public Health, remarked that the Minister for Health accepted the Minister for Mines response.⁵¹

By the early 1960s there were at least three papers discussing the emergence of mesothelioma. Available documents suggest that CSR was made aware of mesothelioma in June 1960. Wittenoom mine manager, Osborne Allan, brought two papers to the attention of ABA Limited Perth and Sydney Head Office.⁵² Dr Gordon Oxer, Wittenoom's doctor, gave Allan a *British Medical Journal* article dated 30th April 1960, “Complications of Asbestosis” by Professor J. McMichael and Dr Hugh-Jones. Allan described it to his superiors in Perth and

⁴⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10307: C.H. Broadhurst, Director, writes to the Managing Director ABA Limited, Sydney with the questions and answers given in the W.A. Legislative Assembly on asbestos-related diseases, 16 September 1958.

⁴⁸ Interview conducted by Criena Fitzgerald with Dr Jim McNulty, Perth, November 2002.

⁴⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10666: The Report of the Commissioner of Public Health for the year 1959 – presented to both Houses of the Western Australian Parliament.

⁵⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10376: Letter from the Minister for Health to the Minister for Mines, 4 March 1960.

⁵¹ Interview conducted by Criena Fitzgerald with Dr Jim McNulty, Perth, November 2002.

⁵² Osborne Allan died of complications from asbestosis in the 1980s. See Hills, Op Cit. p. 122.

Sydney as “quite an interesting article and reveals several facts not known to us before”.⁵³ Allan was referring to mesothelioma. It appears that CSR ignored Allan’s correspondence. CSR’s attention was focused on ABA Limited’s position as a supplier of blue asbestos to Australian and overseas markets and on increasing the mine’s fibre production. In spite of the company’s concern regarding the increasing production costs and competition from other manufacturers in building materials, the 20 per cent increase in profits on those of the previous year by their Building Materials Division, which used the blue asbestos to strengthen their cement sheets, must also have had some bearing.⁵⁴ In April 1960 Wagner, Sleggs & Marchand had reported 33 cases of mesothelioma — at the time an uncommon tumour — in the North Western Cape province of South Africa.⁵⁵ It is not known when CSR became aware of this publication. In March 1963, however, Allan referring specifically to “Health Matters” would pass on to ABA Head Office in Perth the paper Dr Jim McNulty had published in 1962 about the first case of mesothelioma in Wittenoom.⁵⁶

Six months later a CSR memorandum from Sydney dated the 18th September entitled “ABA Wittenoom Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis)” was sent to Malcolm King, an ABA director at that time.⁵⁷ This reveals that the company was keeping abreast of the development of asbestos-related diseases at the Wittenoom mine. Among CSR’s senior officers to initial having read the memorandum were K. O. Brown (in 1963 Managing Director of ABA)⁵⁸ who during the Heys and Barrow case in 1988 would reject the plaintiffs’ counsel’s question regarding whether the sole responsibility for the health and safety of the Wittenoom workers lay with CSR’s managing director and the board of directors (Brown, by 1967 had

⁵³ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibits no.10386 & 10668: Letters from Wittenoom mine manager, O. Allan to 1. General Superintendent Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Perth 2. Managing Director Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Sydney. Both dated 24 June 1960.

⁵⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10234. CSR Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1960.

⁵⁵ Wagner, Sleggs & Marchand, Op Cit. The 33 deaths due to mesothelioma had been reported in one of the country’s blue asbestos mines, run by the English company, Cape Asbestos.

⁵⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10674_01: Memorandum to the General Superintendent ABA Ltd, Perth, 28 March 1963. See under Health Matters.

⁵⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10496: Memorandum to M. G. King (ABA director) ABA Wittenoom: Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis), 18 September 1963. Malcolm King would be asked in 1974 (by which time he was a CSR director and Deputy General Manager) to compile all the information CSR held on the mine’s progress held in Wittenoom, Perth and Sydney. In court in 1988, he would deny any knowledge of asbestosis until after 1960. Given King’s employment with the company since 1933, his visits to overseas asbestos mines as early as 1949 and his close working relationship with C. H. Broadhurst who first mentions asbestosis in 1946, this is highly unlikely.

⁵⁸ Reported in Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554: the ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12.

become a CSR director and remained so until 28 June 1973).⁵⁹ The company was aware that “Increasing prominence is being given in Western Australia to the incidence of asbestosis... 21 cases of asbestosis and silicosis-asbestosis have been attributed to Wittenoom”. CSR was concerned about the amount of liability it currently carried and its future liabilities. The State manager of the W.A. State Government Insurance Office in conversation with CSR had informed senior management “that the claims experience under this policy was very bad”.

The memorandum also addressed prevention of industrial diseases:

The only sure way to prevent asbestosis and silicosis is to reduce the concentration of contaminants in the air to a reasonable figure. This is done by improving ventilation. Regular sampling of air at chosen points is necessary to provide a proper check on the dust concentrations. It is not practical to think in terms of supplying respirators to employees. The hot working conditions make respirators unpopular even in the mill.

On the final page, the memorandum also noted that the author of the memorandum (initialled A. R. J. — most probably A. R. Johnston, an ABA Limited director) and Mr Broadhurst (also an ABA director by then) had recently met with Dr Letham, the Western Australian Director of Public Health. Dr Letham outlined a number of issues to them regarding asbestos exposure, including “Asbestosis can cause lung cancer”. A handwritten notation at the end of the memorandum illustrates the concern regarding the company’s liability for sick workers: “The potential liability is substantial and I recommend close attention... [the second sentence is illegible]”. It was signed BLB.⁶⁰

During the 1960s dust and worker health issues continued to dominate discussions, reaching the highest levels of the Department of Mines, CSR/ABA Limited and the Department of Health. Doctors McNulty, Hunt, A. King and Letham did all within their limited power to disseminate information on the asbestos danger in an attempt to safeguard the

⁵⁹ Hills, *Op Cit.* pp. 122-23. CSR Annual Reports for 1967, 1969 - 1973, accessed at State Library of Victoria, SF 338.7 A1.

⁶⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10496: Memorandum to M. G. King (then an ABA director) ABA Wittenoom: Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis), 18 September 1963. The writer of the memorandum, A. R. Johnston, is listed as an ABA Limited director (as are King and Broadhurst) in Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10554: the ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12. The other initials, B. L. B. are those of B. L. Brennan who was employed as one of CSR’s Senior Functional Officers. His role was Chief Industrial Officer. Brennan is listed in CSR’s Annual Reports for 1967, 1969 - 1975, accessed at the State Library of Victoria at SF 338.7 A 1.

health of Wittenoom's workers.⁶¹ They sought the support of CSR's consultant physician, Dr H. Maynard Rennie — a respected member of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and in 1954 its Honorary Secretary.⁶² Their first letters to Rennie in 1961 outlined the dust conditions and the health consequences for the Wittenoom workers and their families. Rennie, thousands of miles away in Sydney, accepted the assurances of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company regarding the improvements made with the opening of the Colonial Mine in 1957 and the mill built in 1958 to replace those at Wittenoom Gorge. The medical arguments and the statistics on asbestosis and lung cancer provided by Dr McNulty in 1961 did not sway the Sydney physician.⁶³ By 1963, most likely feeling the pressure from his colleagues including Dr Bruce Hunt, a former president of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the tone of his letters to McNulty and Hunt became supportive. Nevertheless, he requested current reports on worker health with which to approach the company.⁶⁴ Dr McNulty had already sent him information on a mill hand employed between 1954 and 1959. McNulty impressed upon Rennie that "Such rapidly progressive disease is uncommon in the literature of industrial chest disease and confirms the fearful hazard to which the workers are exposed".⁶⁵ Dr Rennie sought no doubt to reassure his colleague, Dr Bruce Hunt, in February 1963 when he wrote "I fully agree that there is further action to be taken... I gather in fact that the conditions are worse than they were and this gives me a tremendous pull. I will let you know what goes on".⁶⁶ Nothing conclusive was ever achieved and an invitation to visit Perth to see the conditions firsthand would never be taken up.⁶⁷ It is possible, nevertheless, that those ongoing discussions between Rennie and the department of Health doctors had prompted the meeting between Dr Letham and ABA directors Cecil Broadhurst and A. R.

⁶¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10722: Dr Jim McNulty's Health Department file.

⁶² Royal Australian College of Physicians: retrieved 16 June 2011 from <http://www.racp.edu.au/page/library/college-roll/college-roll-detail&id=826>. See also Sydney Morning Herald, p. 2, Wednesday, 18 August 1954.

⁶³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10353: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr Rennie, 25 October 1961.

⁶⁴ Dr McNulty's Blue Book: Letter from Dr. H. Maynard Rennie to Dr Bruce Hunt, 25 February 1963. Copy obtained from Dr McNulty, November 2008.

⁶⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10673: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr Rennie. 6 February 1963. Re: The mill at ABA the Mines Department Inspector report to me that the mill was dirtier than ever, despite a reduced ore production.

⁶⁶ Dr McNulty's Blue Book: Letter from Dr. H. Maynard Rennie to Dr Bruce Hunt, 25 February 1963. Copy obtained from Dr McNulty, November 2008.

⁶⁷ Hills, Op Cit. p. 67.

Johnston which was mentioned in the September 1963 memorandum to Malcolm King on Industrial Diseases.⁶⁸

The knowledge about asbestos-related diseases and the Department of Health's warnings reached the Minister for Mines but failed to influence him to bring CSR to task over its duty of care to workers. Dr McNulty continued to bring the dangers to the attention of the company, the Department of Mines and the public, even after the mine's closure. He and his colleagues were concerned that the full impact of exposure to blue asbestos had yet to emerge. Despite growing concerns regarding asbestos exposure across Australia, asbestos was only banned in 2003.⁶⁹

CSR and the Department of Mines: Success at All Costs

There were a number of factors behind CSR's and the government's efforts to make the Wittenoom mine a successful operation. In the early 1940s CSR, a successful Australian sugar producing company, was seeking to diversify; its investment in Wittenoom was intended to provide asbestos for plants in its Building Materials Division as well as develop domestic and international markets for the fibre.⁷⁰ According to the report of W. W. W. Shepherd, the Chairman of Turner & Newall, a British asbestos corporation, who visited Wittenoom in 1951, CSR was determined to succeed no matter the amount of investment required in the mine.⁷¹ It was a financial commitment which CSR would maintain to increase production, but which they would ignore with regard to occupational health and safety for its workers. At the same time, the Australian government was seeking to stimulate the country's economy after World War 2 and had included asbestos mining in its strategy for growth. The government wanted Australia to become self-sufficient in asbestos as a precaution against failure in overseas supplies, as had happened during the war. The development of the Wittenoom mine would also facilitate a presence in the isolated northern region of Australia

⁶⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10496: Memorandum to M. G. King (ABA director) ABA Wittenoom: Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis), 18 September 1963.

⁶⁹ Commonwealth of Australia (2009), 'Mesothelioma in Australia', p. 6.

⁷⁰ McCulloch (2006) Op Cit. p. 4.

⁷¹ Shepherd, W. W. F. on Visit to Australia, 28 April, 1951 to 6 June 1951. Turner & Newall Papers 104/1080-1101, Manchester Metropolitan University.

seen as vulnerable to the country's northern neighbours.⁷² Both parties' substantial investment in the project made Wittenoom's success an imperative.

CSR's entry into asbestos mining provided the Building Materials Division with a suitable additive for its building products and as a result the division increased its profitability. The company would nevertheless face logistical difficulties and considerable costs in developing the Wittenoom mine, and they would find it difficult to compete with the price of South Africa's blue asbestos. Commonwealth and State governments gave financial support to CSR to defray the company's costs.⁷³ In CSR and the Department of Mines' endeavour to see the mine succeed, both proved at times complacent and at times intractable in the face of Mines Inspectors' reports and the inspectors' several threats to prosecute the company and close the mine. The inspectors cited the dusty conditions, lack of adequate ventilation and an inefficient exhaust system. The Department of Mines, rather than act upon their Mines Inspectors' advice, vacillated in their response. They waited for ABA Limited to carry out repairs and improvements, which were not always forthcoming. Meanwhile, CSR — who had the final say on all expenditure and decisions at Wittenoom — questioned the inspectors' appraisals and concentrated instead on how to cut costs and increase production.⁷⁴

On at least two occasions in the early years of the mine's operation, CSR, with no experience in mining, reviewed whether to continue the Wittenoom operation.⁷⁵ On the basis of the Commonwealth and Western Australian State governments' assurances of support, the company kept the mine open.⁷⁶ To address its lack of expertise, CSR established relationships with overseas asbestos companies by visiting their mines and factories. In 1948 the ABA Limited Managing Director travelled overseas in search of a suitably qualified candidate with experience in asbestos mining.⁷⁷ From the late 1940s, both CSR and ABA Limited executives made several visits to South Africa's Northwest Cape Province to review

⁷² McCulloch (2008), *Op Cit.* p. 76.

⁷³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: *The ABA Story* (1963), Chapter 12. Layman (1992), *Op Cit.*

⁷⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts from the CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom asbestos venture.

⁷⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extract from CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom mine venture. See entries for February 1945 and February 1946.

⁷⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: *The ABA Story* (1963), Chapter 1.

⁷⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10168: The Managing Director's correspondence to the Wittenoom manager regarding 'Mine Matters', 27 September 1948.

Cape Blue Asbestos Limited's mining practices. Among the company's executives were Malcolm King and Wittenoom mine manager Osborne Allan. In 1949 King reported South African mining practices to be even more primitive than at Wittenoom. Eight years later, Johns-Manville Limited arranged for Osborne Allan to visit the same mine, to inspect mill machinery ABA Limited was considering installing at Wittenoom.⁷⁸ Both visits were to the mines where Wagner's research had reported the deaths of black workers from mesothelioma in the 1950s.⁷⁹ In the recollections King was instructed to record for CSR directors in 1974, he remarked, "From discussions with Johns-Manville in Canada and a week later with Cape Asbestos in South Africa we were always aware of some danger from inhalation of asbestos dust and fibre".⁸⁰

Visits to North American and British companies and their asbestos mines and factories continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with several objectives in mind: to develop or maintain business links established during previous overseas trips, to liaise with new customers and ascertain the likelihood of future asbestos orders, and to reach agreement with competitors on asbestos pricing.⁸¹ The North American and English companies reciprocated CSR's visits. Representatives of the North American company, Johns-Manville, visited Wittenoom from as early as 1949 and those of the British company, Turner & Newall, by 1951.⁸² CSR courted Johns-Manville Limited with a view to their becoming partners in the Wittenoom mine; something which never eventuated.⁸³ Tony Martino, a bus driver in Wittenoom, recalled that among his various duties between 1963 and 1966 was to drive the international visitors to and from the Wittenoom airport, on sight-seeing tours of the Pilbara, as well as being involved in the catering for functions held in their

⁷⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10147: CSR Board Minutes — Entries for 1949; Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10140: Malcolm King, 1949, 'Report on Inspection of Cape Blue Asbestos Limited, Union of South Africa to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company'. Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10229: O. A. Allan and A. N. Marr, 1957, 'Report on visit to Rhodesia and South Africa to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company'.

⁷⁹ Wagner, Sleggs & Marchand, Op Cit. pp. 260-71.

⁸⁰ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 380.

⁸¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10645: C. H. Broadhurst's report of his visit to Europe and North America, 1 November 1956.

⁸² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10170: Letter from C. H. Broadhurst, Wittenoom manager to ABA Limited Engineer in Perth. 14 April 1949. Johns-Manville's Canadian representatives visited for 5 days. Report of Mr. W. W. F. Shepherd on Visit to Australia, 28 April, 1951 to 6 June 1951. Turner & Newall Papers 104/1080-1101, Manchester Metropolitan University.

⁸³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10177: Letter from Managing Director to Wittenoom manager, 12 March 1952.

honour.⁸⁴ CSR's Managing Director also approved executives' attendance at Australian and International conferences to keep abreast of mining practices and, no doubt, as another avenue for maintaining links with international companies.⁸⁵

As the company developed its local and international markets, it gradually increased production. In September 1948 CSR's Managing Director wrote to Wittenoom's manager stressing the need to push production past the 2,000 tons mark and signalled a projected increase to 8,000 tons. In preparation for the expansion, he authorised the Wittenoom manager to order equipment totalling £92,874 [\$185,748].⁸⁶ Large investments would be required to replace existing infrastructure, which could not meet the demand.⁸⁷ Wittenoom proved costly to operate and maintain: its isolation meant high freight costs and machinery lifespan was short due to the abrasiveness of the host ore.⁸⁸ By 1955 CSR, in its application for price protection from competitive asbestos imports, reported to the Tariff Board that it had spent £1,750,000 [\$3,500,000] on capital expenditure, while government assistance had amounted to £450,000 [\$900,000] for housing, roads and water supply.⁸⁹ These expenditure figures are at odds with those outlined in ABA Limited's Report in 1963, which reported the government's contribution for the town's infrastructure at £650,000 [\$1,300,000] compared with CSR's £150,000 [\$300,000].⁹⁰ CSR's application to the Tariff Board proved unsuccessful.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Interview with Tony Martino, Perth, November 2010.

⁸⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10887: Marrero Plant News Bulletin, Wednesday, 6 May 1959 announces the visit of Sydney CSR officials Mr K. O. Brown and Dr. P. A. Hanks to the Johns-Manville Marrero Plant, Louisiana; Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10179: Letter from Managing Director to Wittenoom manager, to give approval to attend the Mining and Metallurgical Conference in Melbourne, 16 April 1952; Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10904: Johns-Manville internal memo: CSR executive's visit, 28 May 1963; Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10162: Letter to the Minister for Industrial Development from ABA Limited's General Superintendent, 28 August 1963. ABA Limited Director Broadhurst was to visit North and South America, England and Europe. The ABA Limited General Superintendent was to visit Pakistan, India and the Asian countries.

⁸⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10168: Letter from the Managing Director to Wittenoom manager, 27 September 1948.

⁸⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts from the CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom asbestos venture.

⁸⁸ McCulloch (1986), Op Cit. p. 77.

⁸⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10144: Tariff Board's Report on Asbestos Fibre, 24 March 1955, p. 20.

⁹⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 4.

⁹¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10144: Tariff Board's Report on Asbestos Fibre, 24 March 1955.

Increased production would ultimately be weighed up against the fluctuating selling price of asbestos and CSR's ability to compete with international companies.⁹² In 1957 ABA Director, C. Broadhurst, reported favourably to the Western Australian Premier on increased annual production: 1955 — 4,400 tons; 1956 — 8,500 tons and by 1957 1,000 tons per month. He cautioned, however, that projected production figures of 17,000 tons for 1958, with an increase to 25,000 tons in 1959 and subsequently 35,000 tons, would proceed if and when the market justified such an increase.⁹³ CSR's 1958 profit and loss statement, despite the international competition, reported positively that

a strong demand continues for blue asbestos and 12,250 tons were sold for the year, compared to 10,500 tons for the previous year. Additional plant is being installed at Wittennoom to meet the expanding market... There was more stability of costs than in recent years and record or near record sales were achieved in nearly every division of the company.⁹⁴

The report, exceeding projected production figures for 1958, went on to say that the

New blue asbestos milling plant has been brought into production at Wittennoom in Western Australia increasing production to 20,000 tons of asbestos fibre per annum. There has been a slight weakening of the overseas market for blue asbestos but local consumption is increasing.⁹⁵

In fact, after 1957, more than half their output was being sold to James Hardie.⁹⁶ However sales to one significant overseas customer, Johns-Manville, had decreased. CSR was unable to compete with Russian asbestos mines and with the English asbestos producer Gefco's blue asbestos mine in South Africa.⁹⁷ As a consequence, the company sought to keep costs down. Between 1957 and 1959 costs had amounted to £961,900 [\$1,923,800].⁹⁸ CSR had planned to build a second mill, but in the light of the decreasing market shelved

⁹² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10191: Letter from C. Broadhurst, Director ABA Limited, to the Premier of W.A. Re Production, 7 June 1957.

⁹³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10191: Letter from Broadhurst, Director ABA Limited, to the Premier of W.A. Re Production, 7 June 1957.

⁹⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10232: Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1958.

⁹⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10232: Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1958.

⁹⁶ Gregory J. & Gothard J. (eds.) (2009), *Historical Encyclopedia*: (University of Western Australia Press), p. 95.

⁹⁷ McCulloch (2008), Op Cit. p. 68.

⁹⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no.10903: Re: mineral claims. Both C.S.R. and A.B.A. have by frequent visits abroad endeavoured to build up the market for blue fibre. 14 September 1959. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10195: Malcolm King's letter to director re Costs, 7 October 1959: 1957 - £181,600 [\$363,200]; 1958 - £476,800 [\$953,600]; 1959 - £303,500 [\$607,000].

further capital expenditure. The profit and loss statement for 1960 proved much more encouraging:

Asbestos: Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd is consolidating its position as a supplier of asbestos to the Australian and overseas markets and production capacity is being raised. Sales for the year ended March, 1960 showed a further increase.⁹⁹

By 1962 the scenario had changed again. The company did not envisage providing capital for further expansion unless there was a marked change in economic prospects and certainty of future markets.¹⁰⁰ The next year ABA Limited seemed more optimistic regarding their market position because while its market for blue asbestos had been adversely affected, among other things, by overproduction and price cutting by the South African producers, they expected improvement in their market position because of

the comparatively rapid lift in the standard of living in Eastern countries and in South America. This will call for a vast amount of water supply and sewerage work involving the use of asbestos cement pipes and building materials.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless in 1964 the company implemented cost cutting measures which led to an increase in worker exodus, with replacements difficult to obtain. This hampered the company's efforts to reach the target of 250 tons per week needed to cover operating expenses.¹⁰² In 1966, three months before CSR announced the Wittenoom closure, the company's report on its Profit and Loss appropriation account showed an accumulated loss of \$2,500,000, with cash outgoings amounting to \$850,000 per annum.¹⁰³ The report had also made brief reference to the Dust and Asbestos Hazards:

We have greatly improved the dust collection system... as more medical work is done on asbestosis and allied complaints, the more the opinion appears to be hardening as to the long term effect on even mild exposure... as time goes on more... costly measures will

⁹⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10234: CSR Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1960, p.10.

¹⁰⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10196: Letter from C. Broadhurst to ABA Limited General Superintendent, Re: Fibre Sales: Mr. Thomas' report on markets, 17 January 1962.

¹⁰¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10554: The ABA Story (1963), Chapter 12.

¹⁰² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10507: Letter from the District Inspector of Mines (Port Hedland) to the Senior Inspector of Mines, 25 February 1964.

¹⁰³ In 1966 Australia had changed to a decimal currency monetary system. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10828: Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. signed by K. O. Brown, 29 September 1966, pp.1 & 6.

be called for to prevent exposure to asbestos dust and short fibres.¹⁰⁴

Mines Inspectors' reports were at odds with K. O. Brown's summation regarding the improvements to the dust collection system. Most had continued to highlight the dust problem, despite what one inspector described in 1962 as the company's praiseworthy efforts to control it. The inspector warned, however, that as the output from the mill was raised, a corresponding deterioration of working conditions could be expected.¹⁰⁵ In fact, throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the conditions in the mine and the mill had remained hazardous, regardless of the Mines Inspectors' recommendations and their unannounced visits to ascertain conditions. The inspectors regularly drew ABA Limited's attention to the need for dust suppression at its source, the installation and proper mounting of ventilation and exhaust equipment, the regular maintenance of exhaust ducts when perforated by the abrasive dust, and the replacement of equipment with more efficient systems as existing ones failed to do the job.¹⁰⁶ Few of the Mines Inspectors' corrective measures were ever implemented. Often the measures carried out by ABA Limited were to satisfy Mines Inspectors, and only served to distort the actual dusty conditions. As one Mines Inspector reported to the State Mining Engineer in 1950, "I visited and inspected the workings of this mine and found conditions generally fairly good... there is every possibility that the management was aware of my intentions and had conditions prepared".¹⁰⁷

Occasionally the visits of the State Mining Engineer and Mines Inspectors' to Wittenoom occurred in response to union concerns about conditions in the mill and the

¹⁰⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10828: Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. signed by K. O. Brown, 29 September 1966, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10489: Letter from the District Inspector of Mines to Senior Inspector of Mines, 13 October 1962.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10578. A.E. Lloyd, District Inspector's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer, 26 November, 1948. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10593. A. E. Lloyd, District Inspector's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer, 13 October 1950. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10272: J. Boyland Report on recent inspections of Northwest and Kimberley, 25 May 1952. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10407: Senior Inspector Boyland writing to State Mining Engineer regarding ventilation in the mine and mill. 19 September 1960. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10457: Letter from A. W. Ibbotson, District Inspector of Mines to Wittenoom manager, Re: Under the provisions of section 22 of the Mines Regulation Act, 6 December 1961. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10483: Letter to the Wittenoom manager, Re: conditions throughout the mine have deteriorated considerably since the last inspection, 25 July 1962. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10364: Letter from Department of Mines, A. J. Murphy to Dr McNulty, Re: dust counts and temperatures, 24 June 1965.

¹⁰⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10261: District Inspector of Mines, J. Boyland's report to the State Mining Engineer, 14 February 1950 on his visit to Wittenoom on the 19 and 20 January.

inadequate ventilation in the mine.¹⁰⁸ The company's acknowledgement of the dust problem and the corrective measures they took were sufficient to satisfy the State Mining Engineer, as we see in his comments to the AWU Secretary, T. Oliver. The State Mining Engineer reported that dust suppression

has been exercising the minds of company officials for some time now and they are continually endeavouring to combat the nuisance. It is fully realized that the dust is a nuisance not only to the men but to the maintenance of the machinery.¹⁰⁹

Assurances such as the one the Wittenoom manager gave Mines Inspector Lloyd in November 1948 would have continued to take the pressure off the mine management. Lloyd reported to the State Mining Engineer that

The present plant would in the near future be discarded and it was the intention of the company to erect a new plant when sufficient data had been obtained as a result of operating the present system.¹¹⁰

Yet it took another ten years before the Colonial mill was built. In 1951, in response to concerns of both the Mines Inspectors and the Commissioner of Public Health, the management appointed its own ventilation officer to the mine.¹¹¹ When ABA acted on a Mines Inspector's request, they made a point of informing him:

In conformity with your request in our Mine Inspection Record Book, we wish to advise that the following work has been carried out on the dust problem in the mill. Along with improvements to suction ducts, dust hoods being fitted to a number of places, regular checks on collectors with duct work being inspected daily for dust obstructions.¹¹²

The concluding point was meant to assure inspectors they were continuing to combat the nuisance:

¹⁰⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10146: C. T. Oliver, secretary AWU's correspondence to J. Foxall, State Mining Engineer, 19 April 1948. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10256: State Mining Engineer Foxall's letter to AWU Secretary, T. Oliver, 10 May 1948. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10278: AWU, AEU, ETU and the Boilermakers unions writing to the District Inspector of Mines, 3 February 1958. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10289: C. Reen, AWU representative writing to Mines Inspector Hunt, 5 March 1958.

¹⁰⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10256: State Mining Engineer Foxall's letter to AWU Secretary, T. Oliver, 10 May 1948.

¹¹⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10578: A.E. Lloyd's report to the State Mining Engineer (Department of Mines), on the state of the Wittenoom mine and mill, 26 November 1948.

¹¹¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no: 10722: slide no. 121, Memo from the Under Secretary for Mines to the Commissioner for Public Health, August 1951.

¹¹² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10225: correspondence from Thomas, acting ABA manager at Wittenoom to District Inspector of Mines, 21 June 1955. Steps taken to eliminate dust.

The above changes have greatly improved conditions within the mill, and our engineering staff in conjunction with the mill superintendent, are investigating all possible avenues of improvement. Should the tariff inquiry prove favourable, we should be in a position to proceed with a wet milling circuit, in which case the dust hazard should become a thing of the past.¹¹³

ABA management, nevertheless, was often “resentful and non-committal and prefer[red] to delay any action for as long as possible just to indicate that they were not forced into immediate action.”¹¹⁴ At other times, the Wittenoom management fully intended to follow Mines Inspectors directives, outlining proposed alterations and improvements to head office for their approval before proceeding.¹¹⁵ The company’s policy to control costs and their direct involvement in the running of the mine is apparent in the ABA Managing Director’s hand written comment on correspondence from the Mine Manager, Osborne Allan: “Only if we agree”. It had been in response to Allan’s comment: “He [the Mines Inspector] has approved of the plan and we are doing everything we possibly can to bring the mine and mill up to the standard they require”.¹¹⁶

Over time, nonetheless, the zeal with which some Mines Inspectors reported on the conditions, decreased, possibly influenced by several factors: the inspector had been worn down by ABA Limited’s inertia in carrying out his directives; he found it easier to acquiesce to a senior officer’s direction to be less rigorous in his dealings with management, or he may have been influenced by the development of a closer working relationship with a company official. Mines Inspector Boyland’s steadfastness in monitoring the working conditions is evident in his report in 1950:

As I had already stopped every development place except two, until adequate ventilation was supplied, I feel confident that the management now fully understands my methods and knows that supervision must be tightened. I am satisfied that all matters which were lacking... are

¹¹³ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10225: correspondence from Thomas, acting ABA manager at Wittenoom to District Inspector of Mines, 21 June 1955. Steps taken to eliminate dust.

¹¹⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10292: Mines Inspector A.W. Ibbottson writing to Senior Inspector of Mines, 3 April 1958.

¹¹⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10454: Letter from Wittenoom manager to Senior Inspector of Mines, 20 November 1962.

¹¹⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10195: 7 October 1959, Malcolm King, CSR pro Managing Director, writing to the Director ABA Limited, Perth to keep costs down. “Consideration should be given to the method of operating the plant to achieve minimum costs...” Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10453: 17 November 1961. O. A. Allan writing to ABA General Manager regarding proposed improvements in the mine.

now being brought up to scratch and Mr Hunter will make periodical calls to maintain a high degree of efficiency. I shall also return to the mine and check up.¹¹⁷

While other inspectors continued to report on the unsatisfactory conditions, Boyland became more congenial in his dealings with the company. In 1956 he focused on the air of optimism in the district, noting “it would appear that ABA is on the threshold of very prosperous times”.¹¹⁸ Two years later, Boyland, now Senior Inspector of Mines, reprimanded Mines Inspector Ibbottson for the same zeal he had himself displayed in 1950. Ibbottson’s view, similar to that expressed by the union, was that conditions in Wittenoom only improved when management had prepared for the expected arrival of the Mines Inspectors.¹¹⁹ Boyland questioned Ibbottson’s ethics for arriving unannounced at Wittenoom. In Boyland’s opinion this was “to be deplored and discouraged”. Boyland’s report to the State Mining Engineer was more tempered: “He [Ibbottson] certainly covered the whole ground when he made his recording for the Record Book but I am afraid he has overstepped his powers”.¹²⁰

Yet four years later, frustrated by “all kinds of promises [that] have been made by management and very few fulfilled”, Boyland appeared more resolute to bring ABA Limited to task over their lack of “total and concerted effort...in the matter of improving conditions”.¹²¹ On one occasion when the threat of closure was raised, CSR drafted a response should the Senior Inspector serve notice: “employees would be stood down without pay”.¹²² Company correspondence to Mines Inspectors noting improvements served to delay the threatened prosecution of the mine’s administration.¹²³

Threats of prosecution or closure by the Senior Inspector of Mines — for failure to

¹¹⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 133, Copy from file M.D. 523/49, 19 June 1950, Inspector Boyland is reporting to the State Mining Engineer on his visit to Wittenoom with Workmen’s Inspector Hunter.

¹¹⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10278: Mines Inspector J. Boyland writing to the State Mining Engineer, 28 June 1956.

¹¹⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10289: C. Reen, AWU representative writing to Mines Inspector Hunt, 5 March 1958, to attend Wittenoom unannounced.

¹²⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10293: Letter from J. Boyland, Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer, 9 April 1958.

¹²¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10476: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer – Ventilation – Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd Wittenoom, 11 April 1962. Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10479: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer — Ventilation Report – June 1962 — 20 July 1962

¹²² Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10455: Letter from ProManaging Director ABA Limited, Malcolm King to General Superintendent ABA Limited, Perth, 30 November 1961.

¹²³ Motley Rice Plaintiff’s Exhibit no. 10454: Letter from Wittenoom manager to Senior Inspector of Mines, 20 November 1962.

follow the Mines Regulation Act — were, however, never carried out despite Boyland's acknowledgement that: "all kinds of promises have been made by the company but very few fulfilled".¹²⁴ In 1962 the Department of Mines took the easier path: they prosecuted four miners — three of whom appear to have Italian surnames — for their failure to heed the Mines Regulations Act. The mine administration did not dismiss them because labour was hard to find.¹²⁵ The only restriction which seems to have been enforced upon the company was to limit production in view of the dust hazard.¹²⁶ The delays inherent in all these discussions allowed CSR to drag its feet, with workers exposed to dust levels much higher than the recommended 176 p. p. c. c.

Dust Counts and Ventilation

During their visits to Wittenoom Mines Inspectors measured temperatures and took air flow measurements in the mine, while dust counts were monitored in the mine and mill. The inspectors outlined several matters which needed attention, and which arose repeatedly in their reports. They were concerned about the use of the main tunnel (adit) entrance as the only point of entry for fresh air and consequently the lack of adequate ventilation/air flow in the mine. Attempts to improve ventilation, for example with door constructions and bratticing¹²⁷ of the mines' levels to direct air flow proved unsuccessful.¹²⁸ Fans were sited inappropriately and proved inefficient in circulating air. The company failed to supervise the correct mounting of ventilation equipment to maintain direction and volume of air flow. Rather than suspend Venturi ducts and cloths intended to supply air flow to the miner above the stope face, these were left lying on the floor of the workings. Furthermore the ventilation of the mine was made more difficult because of the dust entering it from the mill which was

¹²⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10450: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to Wittenoom manager, 6 November 1961. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10479: Letter from the Senior Inspector of Mines to the State Mining Engineer, 20 July 1962.

¹²⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10474: Letter to State Mining Engineer from Senior Inspector of Mines Re: Proposed prosecutions — Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, 5 April 1962. The Italian surnames: Sergio Borsa, Foster Lutero and Vincent Crisci. The fourth was H. Lewes.

¹²⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10457: Letter from District Inspector of Mines Ibbottson to the Wittenoom manager, 6 December 1961.

¹²⁷ Brattice: Partitioning or lining, as of planks or cloth to confine air and force it into working faces of a mine. Taken from Bernard, J. R. L., Blair, D., Butler, S., Delbridge, A., & Ramson, W. S. (eds.) (1982), *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Reprint, McMahons Point NSW: Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd), p. 246.

¹²⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10503: Ventilation Report for 1963. A. Mulholland, 8 January 1964.

adjacent to the mine entrance. In the mill inspectors highlighted the need for regular maintenance of exhaust ducts perforated by the corrosive host rock in the milling process and the ineffectual elimination of dust from the work areas. Always at issue were the high dust counts and the inefficiency of the Konimeter used to measure dust levels.¹²⁹

As early as 1951 Dr Linley Henzell, the Commissioner of Public Health, made his concerns known to the Undersecretary of Mines regarding the Konimeter's ineffectiveness in determining accurate dust counts. It was unable to collect the long asbestos fibres, which triggered asbestosis.¹³⁰ The Konimeter's counts, in any case, were above the permissible level of 176 p. p. c. c.¹³¹ Dr Jim McNulty would also take this up in the 1960s, prompting the Department of Mines to recommend the introduction of a Thermal Precipitator in 1966.¹³² Gersch Major, an industrial hygienist, would only be called in to conduct dust measurements with appropriate instruments in September 1966, a few months before the mine's closure. His measurements ranged from 1,300 p. p. c. c. to 2,100 p. p. c. c. in the mine and between 2,000 and 3,000 p. p. c. c. in the mill, many times above the permissible limit of 176 p. p. c. c.¹³³

Dust containment problems were inherent in the dry milling process used at Wittenoom in the original mill. In 1958 the dust suppression problems would continue in the Colonial Mine's new improved mill, constructed at a cost of £350,000 [\$700,000].¹³⁴ By October that same year, the Mines Inspectors were again reporting high dust levels to ABA management.¹³⁵ In the mine water was used to wet the rock face to contain dust, but the mill dust entered the mine via its main access tunnel, the mine's primary air way.¹³⁶ Any

¹²⁹ Major, Op Cit.

¹³⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10318: Letter from Commissioner of Public Health, L. Henzell, to the Under Secretary for Mines, 26 October 1951.

¹³¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10318: Letter from Commissioner of Public Health, L. Henzell, to the Under Secretary for Mines, 26 October 1951.

¹³² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10518: Letter from Dr McNulty to J. Boyland: Re Dust is still obviously a problem, 25 October 1965. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10524: Thermal Precipitator, 31 March 1966.

¹³³ Major, Op Cit. pp. 469 & 471.

¹³⁴ Motley Rice documents, Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10191. Letter from Broadhurst, Director ABA Limited to the Premier of W.A. Re Production, 7 June 1957. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10828: Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. signed by K. O. Brown, 29 September 1966, p.1. In reality the mill had been opened to meet the North American company, Johns-Manville's blue asbestos orders.

¹³⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10305: Mines Inspectors Ibbotson and Hunt writing to the Wittenoom mine manager, 9 October 1958.

¹³⁶ Major, Op Cit. p. 470.

improvements made to counter the dust problem in the mill were cancelled out with increased production and the dry milling process which created more dust.¹³⁷ Proper maintenance of the perforated exhaust ducts or replacement of equipment was not always carried out, despite the company's assurances to the regulatory authorities to the contrary.¹³⁸ CSR's Malcolm King's claim, in 1974, that "CSR and the asbestos mine management were very conscious of the dust hazards" is supported by CSR's 1963 memorandum to him on Industrial Disease at Wittenoom. In addition to the company's concern about its liability, CSR had suggested several safety measures.¹³⁹ However, King's assertion that "[the company] made determined efforts to control dust emission and minimise exposure of employees" is questionable in light of the many Mines Inspectors' reports.¹⁴⁰ Most Mines Inspectors and the Chamber of Mines of Western Australia were critical of the company's failure to control the dust.¹⁴¹ Dust counts of at least 300 p. p. c. c. and others of 1000+ — well above the accepted 176 p. p. c. c. — were being reported regularly, in the mill and the mine, where ventilation was still a problem in the 1960s.¹⁴² On October 6 1961, Chief Secretary Hudson reported these dust concentrations to the Western Australian General Assembly. He noted that 60 of 103 work places had returned measurements within those ranges.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10188: 20 April 1956: Letter from ABA Limited to C. Broadhurst re Dry Process Plant. CSR wanted to increase production to 10,000 tons per annum in 1957 and had approved an expenditure of £10,000 [\$20,000] for bins to make the introduction of the two extra shifts possible.

¹³⁸ Musk (1992), Op Cit. p. 737.

¹³⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10496: ABA Wittenoom: Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis), 18 September 1963.

¹⁴⁰ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 380. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10444: Meeting pm 10 October 1961 in Mr Brisbane's Office, Mines Department, Perth.

¹⁴¹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10447: Letter from Wittenoom manager Allan to Managing Director ABA Limited, Sydney, Re: a recent visit from the Senior Inspector of Mines who expressed his appreciation at the improvements made to the underground ventilation, 18 October 1961. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10438: Letter from Wittenoom manager to the General Secretary, Chamber of Mines of W.A. Re: Ventilation at Wittenoom, 6 October 1961.

¹⁴² Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10578: A.E. Lloyd, District Inspector's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer, 26 November 1948. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10593: A.E. Lloyd, District Inspector's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer, 13 October 1950. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10633: Letter from J. M. Faichney to State Mining Engineer on Ventilation in ABA mine at Wittenoom, 15 August 1953. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10407: Letter from Senior Inspector Boyland to State Mining Engineer regarding ventilation in the mine and mill, 19 September 1960. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10483: Letter to Manager Wittenoom from a Mines Inspector: Re Conditions throughout the mine have deteriorated considerably since the last inspection, 25 Jul 1962. Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10364: Letter from Department of Mines, A. J. Murphy to Dr McNulty, Re: dust counts and temperatures, 24 June 1965.

¹⁴³ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10351: West Australian: Asbestos Mine was Too Dusty, 6 October 1961.

Four days later, on October 10, Drs Letham and McNulty met with the State Mining Engineer, Senior Inspector of Mines Boyland and C. Thomas, the Manager ABA Limited, to discuss the dust problem, the increasing cases of asbestosis (37 cases) and the ventilation problem. The outcome of the meeting suggests the company's and the Department of Mines position on the matter.¹⁴⁴ At that meeting ABA manager, Thomas, reported that the company had called in Sydney consultants Gregory and Company and was prepared, if necessary, to replace the exhaust/ventilation system. A few days later the State Mining Engineer sent copies of the minutes of that meeting to the Undersecretary who informed the Minister for Mines the next day of the salient points, which included three lung cancer cases. Some of these victims had only ever worked in the Colonial Mill built three years earlier.¹⁴⁵ He ended his report "the company is like the government departments, most concerned about the position and I think everything possible is being done".¹⁴⁶ The group, which had met in the State Mining Engineer's office in October 1961, would meet again on at least one other occasion to discuss the dust issue. According to Mr Thomas, the ABA Limited General Superintendent, the Mines Department expressed general satisfaction as to the progress being made.¹⁴⁷ There was no mention of the Department of Health's contrary view on the company's progress.

Mines Inspector Simmons echoed the Department of Health's view in April 1962 when he questioned the company's efforts: "I fail to see total and concerted effort on the part of Management and the Supervisors in the matter of improving conditions". Boyland, Senior Inspector of Mines, on the other hand, called into question Simmons' view and concentrated on the company's progress.¹⁴⁸ The company's preparedness to replace the exhaust system at the October 1961 meeting, however, did not eventuate because of the cost involved. In

¹⁴⁴ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10444: Meeting pm 10 October 1961 in Mr Brisbane's Office, Mines Department, Perth.

¹⁴⁵ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10441: Memorandum to Under-Secretary of Mines from State Mining Engineer Brisbane, re October 10 1961 meeting held in SME's office. 12 October 1961

¹⁴⁶ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10442: Memorandum from Under-Secretary of Mines to the Minister for Mines, re October 10 1961 meeting held in SME's office. 13 October 1961.

¹⁴⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10466: Meeting pm 8 January 1962 in Mr Brisbane's Office, Mines Department, Perth. This meeting was reported by Mr Thomas, ABA Limited's General Superintendent to the Wittenoom Manager. Re: Meeting was held between the Representatives of ABA, the Mines Dept. and the Health Dept.

¹⁴⁸ Motley Rice, Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10476: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to the State Mining Engineer: Ventilation — Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd Colonial Mine — Wittenoom, 6 April 1962.

1962 the company's estimates to overcome the dust problem and to provide tailings disposal equipment was £250,000 [\$500,000] and another £100,000 [\$200,000] for incidental work before any expansion programme could be undertaken. ABA director Broadhurst focused instead on the development of suitable bulldozers for underground mining, which he argued would overcome many of their problems, without expanding upon how the bulldozers would do so. He informed ABA's General Superintendent that for the ensuing two years emphasis would be placed on these sorts of improvements.¹⁴⁹ Mines Inspectors' reports, however, showed that dust counts continued to be well above accepted levels at that time.¹⁵⁰

In 1966 the Colonial Sugar Refining Company closed the Wittenoom operation. They cited financial losses and the decreasing selling price of the fibre with increased production costs among the reasons.¹⁵¹ The Mines Inspectors' reports and other departmental correspondence regarding Wittenoom would languish in the Department of Mines. On two occasions — 2nd and 10th May, 1979 — these documents were reported as having been destroyed to the Western Australian parliament. This situation changed in 1984. The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia pressured the government until the Department of Mines' documents, critical evidence for the common law damages claims being pursued by asbestos victims, were found in the Department of Mines archives.¹⁵²

CSR's Secret Defence Strategy

The 1960s and 1970s saw a growing awareness of the dangers of asbestos exposure internationally, with one notable New York conference organized by Dr Irving Selikoff in 1964 attracting wide media interest.¹⁵³ In the 1960s Australian researchers began to publish findings on the medical problems of migrants, asbestosis and the first case of mesothelioma

¹⁴⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10196: Letter from C. Broadhurst to ABA Limited General Superintendent, Re: Fibre Sales: Mr. Thomas' report on markets, 17 January 1962.

¹⁵⁰ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10479: Senior Inspector of Mines sends Ventilation Report – June 1962 to the State Mining Engineer, 20 July 1962. Major, Op Cit.

¹⁵¹ National Archives of Australia, Perth: Wittenoom Aerodrome File 66/807. Press statement announcing the closure of Wittenoom from CSR General Manager, Sir James Vernon, 1 December 1966.

¹⁵² Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibit no. 10723: Response to Minister [for Mines] from Director General of Mines, D. R. Kelly regarding correspondence from the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia and lawyers Lavan Solomon regarding the location of relevant Department of Mines files re Wittenoom, 21 November 1984.

¹⁵³ McCulloch & Tweedale, Op Cit. pp. 85-89.

in a Wittenoom worker.¹⁵⁴ This till then rare asbestos-related disease would also begin to appear in other Wittenoom workers and residents. Meanwhile the health of those who left Wittenoom suffering from asbestosis progressively deteriorated. Once brought to the attention of the Australian media, Wittenoom and the hazards of asbestos were widely reported. The *Bulletin* articles in July 1974 and February 1975 and the March 1977 *This Day Tonight* programme in Western Australia pointed to ABA Limited's laxness regarding dust control, and "cover up" measures when there were Health or Mines Department inspections.¹⁵⁵ In response to the media revelations, CSR began to extricate itself from visible links to asbestos mining and prepared a secret defence strategy should asbestos victims seek damages.¹⁵⁶

The *Bulletin* article of 6 July 1974 on Wittenoom prompted CSR executives to go into damage control. They sought answers to the newspaper's report.¹⁵⁷ Deputy General Manager, Malcolm King — in CSR's employ since 1933 — was instructed to assemble what eventually amounted to 20,000 documents that CSR and ABA Limited possessed on the Wittenoom operation.¹⁵⁸ King could not respond immediately to several of CSR's senior management's questions. He had to search the Cottesloe [a suburb of Perth] ABA archives.¹⁵⁹ This of itself is an interesting revelation, because in the early common law cases which failed, CSR would only provide about 30 documents. Vojakovic and Gordon were blunt in their summation of CSR in this regard: "Clearly, if people were going to take on CSR, CSR wasn't going to give them a leg up from their own records".¹⁶⁰ These are questionable actions over which CSR has never been called to account — given "the conventions of legal discovery require all parties involved in legal proceedings to give discovery by making

¹⁵⁴ McNulty(1962), Op Cit. Saint, E. G. (1963), 'The Medical Problem of Migrants', *Medical Journal Australia*, pp. 1335-40. Elder, Op Cit.

¹⁵⁵ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 386. Peacock (1978), Op Cit.

¹⁵⁶ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit.

¹⁵⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10674_05: Some questions and answers concerning Bulletin Cover Story: "Is there a killer in your home?" July 6 1974.

¹⁵⁸ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. pp. 377 & 393. Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10674_05: Some questions and answers concerning Bulletin Cover Story: "Is there a killer in your home?" July 6 1974.

¹⁵⁹ Motley Rice Plaintiff's exhibit no. 10674_05: Some questions and answers concerning Bulletin Cover Story: "Is there a killer in your home?" July 6, 1974.

¹⁶⁰ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 393.

available a list of all documents in their possession, custody or power relevant to the matters in issue to the other party or parties".¹⁶¹

CSR went to great lengths to avoid the payment of damages to asbestos victims.¹⁶² The company's efforts to protect their own interests commenced with two changes to their subsidiary company, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, which had operated the Wittenoom mine. Firstly, in 1974, ABA Limited's name was changed to Midalco Pty Ltd.¹⁶³ Secondly, and not commonly known, in May 1975 the parent company, CSR, reduced Midalco's capital from \$7,000,000 to a sole asset of \$100,000. CSR had given this amount to Midalco as an interest free loan. As one CSR executive remarked in October 1977, "it could be dynamite if known".¹⁶⁴ That same year CSR established the Wittenoom Trust, apparently to aid Wittenoom victims. The Trust, however, was a vehicle to uncover the unsuspecting victims' strategies in their common law cases against CSR.¹⁶⁵ Several participants in this research mentioned approaching the Wittenoom Trust for financial help or that they attended the Trust's social functions and excursions. These included Christmas in July, Easter and Christmas lunches, regular bingo events, and Mother's and Father's Day celebrations. Excursions outside of Perth were made to Rottnest Island and Kalgoorlie. One participant recalled CSR had holiday homes in Bunbury made available to them.

By December 1977 the company had finalized its defence strategy, should it be required to defend itself in the courts. In his 30 page report, John Rothery of the Sydney law firm, Freehill, Hollingdale and Page, recommended that CSR stand behind Midalco's limited liability. "Midalco was the operating company and had insurance protection. The insurers (and society generally) should carry all the liability. It is really not CSR's responsibility".¹⁶⁶ Rothery's legal advice concluded that with Midalco not liquidated, in the event of damages claims based on a case of negligence, Midalco could be sued. They would not, however, have the money to pay claims beyond the \$100,000 it held unless CSR stood behind its

¹⁶¹ Explanation of the term legal discovery provided in an email by Emilia Oprandi, solicitor, 28 December 2012. See also Simpson, S.D., Bailey, D.L. and Evans, E.K. (1984), *Discovery and Interrogatories*; (Sydney: Butterworths).

¹⁶² Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit.

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 378.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 389 & 393.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 392, 398-401.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 390.

subsidiary. J. F. Blaxland, CSR's Corporate Secretary, had conceded the company's negligence at their 8th September 1977 meeting — one of several that year — during which Malcolm King, F. N. Lewis (CSR legal department) and W. Harvey (nominal chairman of Midalco Pty Ltd) were present.¹⁶⁷

Legal advice quashed any notion of generosity towards the victims on the grounds that there was no way to ascertain the number of potential claimants. Two CSR executives, Ian Burgess and J. F. Blaxland, felt the weight of the moral obligation to the asbestos victims but would acquiesce given the legal advice.¹⁶⁸ Vojakovic and Gordon summarized CSR's strategy thus: "delay, don't settle, don't be generous, ride it out, keep it quiet, hide the truth, and whatever happens make sure they never pin anything on CSR".¹⁶⁹ The early claimants for compensation would fail as a result.

Litigation and Future Claims

CSR's strategy almost worked. In 1988 the company came within 24 hours of having to pay out nothing, instead of the recorded pay outs in damages and compensation in Australia and the U.S. which now amount to hundreds of millions of dollars.¹⁷⁰ A year earlier, on 2nd January 1987, at the request of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, legal firm Slater and Gordon had opened an office in Perth to run test cases on behalf of Wittenoom victims.

The firm believed that with the available evidence and the statute of limitations defence removed, they could mount a successful claim. The extension granted by the Western Australian Government to the statute of limitations in 1984 was about to expire on the 18th January 1987. Three days before its expiration, lawyers Luisa Formato and John Gordon issued approximately 400 civil damages claims, mostly on behalf of the Wittenoom victims. The writs were issued against Midalco Pty Ltd and CSR, since many of the writs related to pre-1959, when apparently Midalco had no insurance and, by 1987, no assets. A search of the Corporate Affairs Office in 1983 showed that Midalco Pty Ltd's net assets

¹⁶⁷ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 389.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 388-389. J. F. Blaxland, CSR's Corporate Secretary presented the final secret strategy recommendations to CSR in 1977. Ian Burgess, by 1987 was Managing Director of CSR.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 382

¹⁷⁰ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. p. 382. McCulloch (2006), Op Cit. p. 15.

amounted to \$337.¹⁷¹ In an attempt to dissuade claimants, CSR issued press statements to remind Wittenoom victims of the previously unsuccessful claims. Any public suggestion that CSR were responsible was countered with the threat of defamation proceedings.¹⁷²

In 1988 the success of several cases signalled the start of the fracturing of CSR's strategy. In Victoria, Klaus Rabenault was awarded \$426,000 compensation and \$250,000 punitive damages, upheld despite CSR's appeal. Meanwhile in Perth, after losing his test case in November 1987, Wally Simpson won his retrial. By August 1988 Heys and Barrow had won their case against CSR.¹⁷³ The Heys and Barrow case would never have gone ahead in November 1987 if the failed test case of Wally Simpson had been decided the day prior to the start of their proceedings. Legal firm Slater and Gordon was under enormous financial pressure, having lost the Simpson case and from having put substantial sums of its own money into the issuing of the 400 writs the year before. The case of mesothelioma victims Peter Heys and Tim Barrow ran for 180 days. Several motions of inadequate discovery were required for CSR to hand over the list of the 20,000 documents Malcolm King had collected in the 1970s, confirming CSR's knowledge regarding asbestos-related disease and other related matters.¹⁷⁴ Had ABA Ltd secretary Joan Joosten's lawyer possessed these, instead of the 30 or so documents CSR had handed over in legal discovery during her case in 1979, Joan Joosten may at least have died knowing she had been awarded damages.¹⁷⁵ Instead, the late Joan Joosten's husband would have to wait for the class action nearly ten years later.

Later in 1988, an anonymous source within CSR disclosed CSR's internal strategy planning, which had taken place between 1974 and 1980, to journalist, Michael Gill.¹⁷⁶ One can only surmise that this source was within the senior ranks of CSR, as the strategy was

¹⁷¹ Vojakovic & Gordon, *Op Cit.* p. 397. The Attorney-General of W.A. Joe Berenson reported this finding during his introduction to the amendments to the Statute of Limitations — the result of lobbying by the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia — which changed the law for asbestos victims to seek damages for their illness to read from the time of exposure to the time of the victim learning they had an asbestos related disease.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* pp. 404-405.

¹⁷³ Vojakovic & Gordon, *Op Cit.* p. 406. See also Hills, *Op Cit.* pp. 119 & 124.

¹⁷⁴ Vojakovic & Gordon, *Op Cit.* p.393.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with John Gordon, barrister, Melbourne, June 2011. Gordon worked for Slater and Gordon and was involved in the negotiated settlement.

¹⁷⁶ Vojakovic & Gordon, *Op Cit.* p. 410.

only known to a handful of CSR's executives.¹⁷⁷ Gill passed on the information to asbestos victims' legal representatives, Slater and Gordon. With this information, in 1989 Slater and Gordon won a class action for 288 Wittenoom workers. The Deed of Covenant showed the total pay out was \$18,425,000. The agreement included a clause that Slater and Gordon "would not produce to any other entities the documents and knowledge in its possession in return for the payment of \$700,000".¹⁷⁸ CSR prolonged the process by imposing conditions which drew out the waiting period before the final award of damages was paid to the claimants.¹⁷⁹ After the settlement, CSR released a statement to allay shareholders concerns about the extent of their future liabilities. The public record shows those liabilities exceeded the amount of \$35 million CSR reported to its shareholders in July 1989.¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, Slater and Gordon pursued CSR for payment of damages to residents who developed an asbestos-related disease.¹⁸¹ Between the mine's closure and 2006, CSR has paid out in excess of A\$500 million in damages and compensation in Australia. By March 2000, CSR had paid out in excess of A\$100 million in U.S. settlements and legal fees.¹⁸²

Few of those interviewed for this research spoke about their damages claims. On the 11th October 1989, a week after the delivery of the judgement in favour of the class action, Sperandio Delpero was interviewed on SBS radio. He still did not know how much he was to receive in damages. He had been told he should receive \$310,000. To Umberto Martinengo's questions: "Is that a fair figure?" he replied:

No, non è tanto giusta.....ma adesso non cela farò neanche a spenderli se me li danno. Dunque è meglio che me li prenda e che me li godo quattro giorni. Almeno posso... abito in una casa di asbestos. Mi comprerò una macchina che mi goderò quattro giorni se posso.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10652: 29 April 1977: Meeting re: Wittenoom claims. In attendance were CSR directors; J. F. Blaxland (who prepares the report), Malcolm King, R. W. Harvey and F. N. Lewis.

¹⁷⁸ Motley Rice Plaintiff's Exhibit no. 10739: Re CSR (& ABA & SGIO)/Slater and Gordon Agreement with CSR's lawyers. This agreement was for a period of five years from the date of signing, i.e. till 1994.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with John Gordon, barrister, Melbourne, July 2008.

¹⁸⁰ CSR (1989), State Library of Western Australia, Batty Library, PR8679, Wittenoom articles, 'Wittenoom and Asbestos: the answers to questions some shareholders have asked', 3 July.

¹⁸¹ Vojakovic & Gordon, Op Cit. pp. 407-408.

¹⁸² McCulloch (2006), p.15.

¹⁸³ Interview by radio journalist Umberto Martinengo, SBS Italian radio program, with Sperandio Delpero. 11 October 1989. It's not really fair.....but I won't even make it to spend it [his damages payment] if they give it to me. So it's better that I take it and that I enjoy my remaining days. At least I can... I live in an asbestos house. I'll buy a car which I can enjoy the short time that I have, if I can.

Delpero died in 1996, at the age of 71. Bruno Giannasi, aged 67, and his wife Valentina were also part of that class settlement, reached the year after Bruno Giannasi's death. Alvaro, their son, remembers that his mother was awarded more than his father because of her loss of earnings, because she was her husband's full-time carer.

With CSR's breach of its duty of care and proof of their negligence established, the way opened for other victims to seek damages. From the 1990s, as more ex-Wittenoom workers were diagnosed with mesothelioma, they would pursue common law claims for damages, including psychiatric injuries.¹⁸⁴ One claimant, Liborio Napolitano, had gone to Wittenoom as a 21 year old. He suffered from severe depression and lived with the fear of developing and dying from the horrific mesothelioma symptoms. He did so in 1996.¹⁸⁵ Several participants mentioned out of court settlements, reached as victims became too ill to face the stress of a courtroom process, in their final months before dying from mesothelioma. The confidentiality clauses contained in such settlements preclude public scrutiny. The complex decisions arrived at by judges have perhaps steered victims to out of court settlements, for asbestos victims still have to go through the emotionally-charged process of proving their claim. Decisions have not always been in favour of the plaintiffs, requiring them to pursue the appeals process.¹⁸⁶ This makes the comments of Maria Martino at her late husband's court hearing, in the later stages of his illness, all that more poignant:

We would take Michael with us but he wouldn't sit in on the hearing because it wasn't very nice sitting listening to the defence trying to defend a company against a child that was just up there with his family and being a child and playing — doing what normal kids do — that was really hard. To sit there and listen to them tell you that your life expectancy is only worth [so many] dollars... How can you put prices like that on a man with young kids?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ In W.A. court searches I found the cases of Liborio Napolitano-vs-CSR Ltd & Midalco Pty Ltd [1994] Supreme Court of Western Australia, 30 August. Della Maddalena-vs-CSR Ltd & ANOR [2002] WADC 260, 2002, District Court Of Western Australia, 17 December 2002. Della Maddalena-vs-CSR LTD & ANOR [2004] The Full Court Of Supreme Court Of Western Australia, 13 October. CSR Ltd & Anor and Arturo Della Maddalena [2006] High Court of Australia, 2nd February. Francesco Candeloro vs CSR and Midalco Pty Ltd [1996] District Court of Western Australia, 9 May.

¹⁸⁵ Napolitano, Op Cit.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Della Maddalena-vs-CSR Ltd & ANOR [2002] WADC 260, 2002, District Court Of Western Australia, 17 December. Della Maddalena-vs-CSR LTD & ANOR [2004] The Full Supreme Court Of Western Australia, 13 October. CSR Ltd & Anor and Arturo Della Maddalena [2006] High Court of Australia, 2nd February.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Maria Martino, Perth, November, 2010.

In 2010 the availability of funds for compensation payments to future asbestos victims was in doubt. CSR's proposed demerger — with the new CSR solely responsible for meeting asbestos claims, but with less capital and no access to Sucrogen's assets and earnings — had raised this question in view of concerns of a further reduction in assets.¹⁸⁸ In the event of the sugar division being sold, in 2010 the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union requested that "an amount be set aside as a safety net available in the event of an unexpected increase in compensation payments". The union also requested a meeting be arranged with all interested stake holders and all asbestos support groups to discuss with the actuaries their modelling in relation to "a possible future scenario whereby, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, the claims could not be paid and CSR's liabilities dramatically increased".¹⁸⁹ Representations by various unions to gain CSR's assurances for funds to be set aside for future claims did not receive a definitive response.¹⁹⁰

By July 2010 the sale of Sucrogen to Wilmar, a Singaporean publicly listed multinational company, had been concluded. CSR had a range of capital management options to utilise proceeds from the deal — with an expected net profit of about \$1.6 billion, subject to capital gains tax liability and transaction costs. CSR confirmed that "it continues to accept its responsibilities with respect to its asbestos liabilities and will maintain a responsible capital structure to support its future obligations". CSR Chairman Jeremy Sutcliffe stated that in determining the use of the cash from the sale and CSR's asbestos provisioning they would need to look at three things, the first of which was to: "recognize our historic asbestos liabilities... nothing changes. We've embarked upon very detailed disclosure year on year and that's going to continue".¹⁹¹ The Treasurer, Wayne Swann, approved the sale under the foreign acquisition law "subject to legally enforceable

¹⁸⁸ Maiden, Malcolm (2010), 'History was against CSR on asbestos', *The Age: BusinessDay*, 4 February, p. 16. Sexton, Elisabeth (2010), 'Asbestos ghost spooks court from CSR split', *The Age: BusinessDay*, 4 February, p. 1-2.

¹⁸⁹ Bastian, P. (2010), letter to legal counsel for CSR Limited, Ms. Debbie Schroeder from the President of the AMWU, 25 May.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with John Gordon, barrister, Melbourne, June 2011.

¹⁹¹ Li, S. (2010) *Sutcliffe Says CSR to Review Options for Sale Proceeds: Video*, 2010, YouTube video 6th July: Interview with CSR Chairman Jeremy Sutcliffe conducted by Bloomberg's Susan Li. Retrieved 29/8/2012 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/video/q7tAUHrnw0w-sutcliffe-says-csr-to-review.aspx>

undertakings”, which included measures to ensure that sick workers and their families damages payments would not be affected.¹⁹²

Court judgements have held CSR accountable, as evidenced by the payment of compensation and, in some cases, punitive damages. There have been no other legal ramifications for CSR, unlike the former owners of the Swiss Eternit Corporation, who in February 2012 were sentenced in an Italian court to sixteen years gaol for their negligence in knowingly having exposed their employees and the local residents of Monfalcone to asbestos and asbestos-related diseases.¹⁹³

Conclusion

In light of the available and increasing scientific knowledge linking asbestos exposure to two of the three major asbestos-related diseases prior to the opening of the Wittenoom mine in 1943, the high number of deaths from asbestos-related diseases among Wittenoom workers and residents was avoidable. The scientific knowledge grew as more cases of asbestosis, lung cancer and eventually mesothelioma were reported in the global research literature.

During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, the efforts of the Western Australian Department of Health and several Mines Inspectors to bring the dust and associated health problems at Wittenoom to the attention of CSR and the Western Australian Department of Mines went unheeded, as CSR and the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments pursued their economic goals. Both governments ignored or proved complacent in the face of those warnings. As part of the Commonwealth’s overall post war economic strategy, significant government investment in the necessary infrastructure to attract workers and their families to Wittenoom in order to establish a self-sufficient asbestos industry no doubt held sway over the Department of Mines and its Minister’s failure to enforce the Mines Regulation Act. CSR’s threat to close the mine was no doubt also significant.

¹⁹² Reuters/AAP Staff Reporter (2010), 'FIRB approves Sucrogen sale', *Business Spectator*. Retrieved 12/9/2012 from <http://www.businessspectator.com.au/bs.nsf/Article/CSR-wins-FIRB-nod-for-Sucrogen-sale-pd20101108-AZDC2?OpenDocument>.

¹⁹³ Peacock, M. (2012), 'Billionaire, baron get 16 years for asbestos deaths'. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-02-14/billionaire-baron-get-16-years-for-asbestos-deaths/3828204>

Wanting to diversify their interests beyond their already highly successful sugar interests, CSR, encouraged by commonwealth and state support, had entered into asbestos mining in the pursuit of more profit. Buttressed by the Department of Mines inertia in the discharge of the Mines Regulation Act, CSR proved intractable regarding when and if to implement the Mines Inspectors' advice to improve working conditions. The company's assurances to the Department of Mines that they were dealing with the dust issues, in fact, allowed CSR to move slowly on the introduction of the new mill they finally opened in 1958, as well as any ventilation or dust suppression improvements to safeguard workers' health.

The establishment of the Wittenoom mine had been borne of specific economic goals and disregarded the impact asbestos would eventually have on the health of workers and their families. The official reasons for Wittenoom's closure in 1966 similarly failed to acknowledge the growing health implications. Rather, CSR cited financial losses. Wittenoom's closure came at a time when, despite the known hazards, global sales of asbestos products and profits were increasing. The company also participated in the price fixing of asbestos, acknowledged by ABA director, C. H. Broadhurst, in the late 1950s. Given ABA Limited's reported loss of \$2.5 million in 1966, the question of \$7 million present in the non-liquidated ABA Limited's account in 1975 remains, which CSR replaced with a \$100,000 interest free loan. Increasing discussion in the international media regarding asbestos-related diseases in the 1960s and available CSR correspondence on the increasing cases of asbestos-related diseases at that time show that despite subsequent denials the company's senior executives were monitoring health issues at the Wittenoom mine. The reasons for the mine's closure may have been influenced much more than CSR has ever admitted by the possibility of litigation, in view of the unquantifiable number of future mesothelioma cases.

The media scrutiny of the 1970s regarding what had gone on at Wittenoom prompted the CSR secret defence strategy of hiding behind the limited liability of its subsidiary Midalco, formerly ABA Limited, to avoid anticipated damages claims. Despite the moral obligation felt by at least two senior CSR executives, the protection of the company's name and their profits had taken precedence over damages payments to workers dying from asbestos-related disease. That moral obligation did weigh heavily on the to this day unnamed informant who

revealed CSR's strategy in 1988. This disclosure paved the way for Wittenoom victims to receive damages for the consequences that resulted from asbestos exposure, to which they would never have agreed had they known the truth about its dangers.

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that CSR and the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments have all contributed to the deaths reported in the Wittenoom population, as well as those which have emerged and will continue to do so in the general population as a result of environmental exposure to products containing asbestos.

Conclusion

The Wittenoom blue asbestos mine closed in 1966. In light of the high number of deaths in the Wittenoom worker and resident population, it is considered Australia's worst industrial disaster. In fact, long after the surviving Wittenoom residents have passed away, deaths will continue to occur as a result of environmental exposure to products containing Wittenoom's blue asbestos. CSR used the fibre in its Building Materials Division to develop products used widely in Australia. It also sold the blue asbestos fibre to various Australian manufacturers, including James Hardie, Australia's largest manufacturer of asbestos products, and exported it to North and South America, Europe and Asia. One of the many uses of asbestos is in underground cement pipes which carry water to our homes. In Australia, many do-it-yourself renovators remain unaware of the presence of asbestos in older homes and the dangers they face should they disturb the fibre — as I did before undertaking this research.

CSR's take over of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine in 1943 occurred at a time when the global industry was rapidly expanding. The benefits of the strengthening and insulating qualities of asbestos fibre, often called the "magic mineral", led to its use in over 3,000 products world wide. In the eyes of the asbestos industry, the benefits far outweighed any dangers. The industry ignored the mounting international research linking occupational and environmental exposure to asbestosis and lung cancer. The Australian Commonwealth Health Department had listed asbestos as a health hazard in 1922. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments encouraged CSR's involvement in asbestos mining.

Despite CSR's initial hesitancy, the Wittenoom mine proceeded once Commonwealth and Western Australian governments provided considerable financial support. The sugar company experienced great difficulties in retaining a stable and experienced workforce at the mine. By 1950, it had become clear to the Australian government that its migration policy, designed to attract the fair skinned migrants such as the Scandinavians, had failed to produce sufficient numbers to fill available jobs in its National Development Projects, which

included the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine. This led to the recruitment of experienced miners in northern Italy. CSR's recruitment strategy complemented the Italian government's plan for millions of its unemployed working class citizens to emigrate in order to find work. The operators of the Island of Elba coalmine, itself facing a serious economic crisis, were also aware of ABA Limited's search for suitable workers for their asbestos mine. They too encouraged their workers to emigrate and work at Wittenoom, rather than face unemployment in Italy. From these early recruits the word spread about the high wages at the Australian mine. Despite being made aware of the poor conditions 1100 Italians, many with families, went to Wittenoom. The company had failed to warn any of the workers of the dangers of blue asbestos exposure.

This thesis has documented the ways in which the Wittenoom Italians made meaning of their complex lives: in Italy, during their time at the Wittenoom Gorge, and during their subsequent *sistemazione* in Western Australia or Italy. My analysis of the interviews and documents dealt with several themes: the Wittenoom Italians' motivations for immigrating to Australia; the impact of having lived and worked in Wittenoom on the men, women and children; the Italians' subsequent endeavours to achieve and consolidate *sistemazione*; why CSR closed down the mine in 1966; the evolution of the scientific knowledge on asbestos in Australia and more particularly, Western Australia; the consequences of the contrary position of the Department of Mines and CSR to the Department of Health on workers' and residents' health; and CSR's strategy to avoid legal liability for asbestos-related diseases arising from asbestos exposure at Wittenoom. The role of the Wittenoom asbestos mine in the lives and deaths of Italian transnational workers has, in fact, been far more complex than I had assumed when I first undertook this research.

At the time of CSR's entry into asbestos mining in the early 1940s, many of the participants in this research were children, adolescents or young adults coming to terms with the impact of the war on their lives. From my previous reading on Italian migration history and my family's migration stories I had believed that it was the economic impact and physical devastation of World War 2 alone which had prompted Italians to emigrate. Yet, as I outlined in Chapter Three, participants' narratives spoke of the hardship and personal tragedies

working class Italians had faced in everyday life before World War 2. The war had merely exacerbated their situation. Their stories also highlighted their spirit of youth and their desire for adventure. Families who had had no choice but to separate when breadwinners left to find jobs were reunited in Australia. Working class Italians had already experienced several migration trajectories within Italy or to neighbouring European countries. Most had only been able to find seasonal jobs or short term employment. To reunite families and redress the immediate need for permanent work, men took up the offer of work in Western Australia and at the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine. Hardship and economic necessity made Italian migrants ideal workers for jobs which Australians refused to undertake.

Unrelenting heat, difficult working conditions and meagre living arrangements epitomized life in the remote mining town. Attracted by earnings far greater than they had previously known, Italians — the largest of the 52 migrant groups present in Wittenoom — tended to stay longer, particularly if accompanied by their families. Chapter Four contends that the information early recruits received through interpreters during their interview in Italy differed from the conditions they found and those briefly outlined in the employment contract. Wittenoom's physical geography bore no resemblance to the landscape and climate where they lived in Italy. The dusty conditions in the mill and low stope height in the mine were worse than anything they had ever experienced in Italian or Belgian mines, in French chemical factories or on the construction sites for Italy's underground passes and the Alpine dam projects.

Conditions at Wittenoom were soul destroying for most, and the reason for the highly transient population. The early Lombard and Island of Elba recruits were experienced miners, unlike the workers from the Trentino Alto Adige and others who followed. The dusty and cramped conditions pushed the majority of experienced Lombard miners, who had come without families, to leave once they had repaid the air fare. Lack of money, on the other hand, forced those from the Island of Elba and Trentino Alto Adige — all with accompanying families — to see out their two year contracts and then extend their stay for several more years. The high cost of living, the sending of remittances home to Italy and the need to repay air fares meant it took longer to accumulate savings to buy a house, farm or

business and a return ticket to Italy, if repatriation figured in their plans. During the 1950s and 1960s, despite the word spreading about the difficult working conditions in Wittenoom, the high earnings continued to attract the Italians. They tolerated the conditions in order to achieve their financial goals. Single Italians also stayed for extended periods or returned for a second stint. They were drawn by the high earnings, the freer lifestyle or were saving for a home because of their impending marriage. Elsewhere in Western Australia they had earned lower wages and faced an uncertain economic and employment situation.

Reminiscent of their life back in Italy, the young men's accounts and available photos show how they entertained themselves, often using humour to deal with the loneliness and to forget the difficult working conditions for a while. A number were drawn into the gambling and drinking. Most drank because of the heat. The photo of one young Italian jokingly pouring a bottle of beer down the throat of another was, however, probably not far from the truth for some men. Single and married men alike gambled away hard won earnings, in the hope of winning the elusive pot. It usually contained thousands of pounds and the IOUs of men desperate to leave. Loss of their weekly earnings brought tears and despair. The gambling and drinking for many only served to lengthen a man's stay.

Those who kept their distance from the gambling and limited their drinking earned large sums of money. Italians, in particular, became highly sought after by CSR because of their productivity. They nevertheless had to make disproportionate sacrifices. CSR rarely followed the advice it received to complete maintenance and improvements at the mine and the mill. They did, however, invest in infrastructure to increase production, almost invariably at the expense of occupational health and safety, as we saw in Chapter Nine. Work in the mine was backbreaking, while the mill's high dust levels made it impossible to recognize a worker standing a metre away. The longer staying and hard working Italians were exposed to high levels of dust, developing asbestosis in shorter time frames than previously reported among any other workers. ABA Limited executives and administrative staff working in the nearby office were also exposed, as were the women and children eleven kilometres away in the town. Asbestos fibres arrived in the town on the prevailing winds or were in the tailings laid in the town to contain the rest dust. Participants in this research stated they were

unaware of the health implications of asbestos exposure. They would never have gone, taken or given birth to children, had they known — an argument difficult to dispute. Drawn together in the face of Wittenoom's adversity, many enduring friendships were forged among the men, women and children regardless of their ethnic background.

The women's perspective on life in Wittenoom described in Chapter Five and the childhood experiences outlined in Chapter Six suggest the growing sense of community and normality their presence engendered in what was a predominantly male dominated mining town. The establishment of this sense of community was exemplified in the Italians' participation in the building of the Catholic church and involvement in the celebration of the mass, the opening of the Italian style bar and their attendance at and organization of many of the social activities which had increased with the arrival of the women and children. Importantly, the tightly-knit community provided a secure environment for the children to play and explore. As parents worked, the children experienced an idyllic lifestyle, something which they had not known in Perth or Italy. They attended school, where homework was apparently unheard of. Their curiosity got them into trouble; they experienced their emerging sexuality; and once old enough the boys found work as bus drivers, boiler makers and mechanics, and the girls were employed in the General Store.

The character and resilience of the women is confirmed in their accounts of everyday life. Once the initial tears over the living conditions had stopped, the women who stayed got on with life as best they could. Their presence injected a sense of normality. This was evident in the reintroduction of traditional rites of passage and rituals; their provision of emotional and practical support for their husbands and to young, lonely boarders; and the responsibility they assumed for the family purse. Reflecting the growing trend among migrant women in the 1950s and 60s, many Italian women in Wittenoom engaged in paid work as well as caring for their families. In order to contribute to the family's savings, many opened boarding houses, while some found work in the town. Mirroring the hardships and tragedies many had experienced in Italy, women had to deal with difficult childbirths and the death of their young children. Male and female participants' experience of hardship in Italy and their determination to endure the conditions at Wittenoom suggest the mining town was but one

more experience of hardship they would have to overcome. They were more likely to make sacrifices because of the tangible rewards Italian couples' combined efforts produced: homes, businesses and farms and the creation of a more secure future for their children.

Chapter Seven and Eight trace the pathways to *sistemazione* and the asbestos-related diseases which emerged in the process. Once most had accumulated sufficient savings, they left to consolidate their *sistemazione* in Italy, or in Western Australia. By the time of Wittenoom's closure in 1966 many ex-Wittenoom Italian families were living in a fully paid home, had bought farms or set up what were to become successful businesses, many with their Wittenoom earnings. Continuing to reflect the trend among migrant females to engage in paid work, many of the women worked or re-entered the workforce after the birth of their children, with extended family providing child care. Personal drive, hard work, entrepreneurship and resilience ultimately provided a secure *sistemazione*, even for those who had returned from Wittenoom with little or nothing to show for their hard work. Most single first generation Italians had chosen to marry within their regional community. The couples then focused on creating a secure future for their families. They provided their children with a higher standard of education or the opportunity to learn a trade, which in turn has seen many of them become self-employed or engaged in white collar jobs.

As part of their *sistemazione* process Italians faced the decision of whether to remain in Australia or repatriate to Italy. Repatriation often came down to the first generation's feelings of loss and their desire to return to Italy so that their children received an Italian education and maintained their cultural heritage. Two main reasons emerged which influenced Italians to remain in Australia. Where the children were ensconced in the Australian way of life, the parents' concern was that if they repatriated their children would experience the same challenges they had as immigrants. Their children would be in a country where they understood neither the language (or very little of it) nor the way of life. In addition, they would have had to undertake the least-sort after jobs. There were also those who settled in Australia because they were content with the life they were making for themselves and their families.

Regardless of where they settled, Italian parents and children have had to deal with issues of identity and belonging. In Australia, first generation Italian parents and their children straddled two cultures. Issues of identity and belonging typically emerged in their stories as they spoke about the clash of the two cultures. Many reconciled these issues, as Australian society embraced aspects of Italian culture and Italians adopted typically Australian traditions. Making visits home to Italy has gone some way to address feelings of nostalgia and a sense of loss. Nevertheless, these transnational Italians have experienced rejection as domiciled Italians failed to acknowledge childhood bonds returning Italians had hoped to re-establish. Repatriating Italians have also faced rejection. Italians who never left discounted the contribution of emigrants to Italy's economic growth. In contrast, repatriated Italians argue that their remittances improved the lives of those who remained behind, while their migration decision meant less competition for the jobs in the country's newly developed industries. To this day, several research participants remain ambivalent regarding their identity and where they belong.

Where Wittenoom was concerned, I had believed it highly unlikely that anyone would want to re-visit the town where they had experienced asbestos exposure and the loss of a loved one to an asbestos-related disease. When I found newspaper articles which spoke of Venera Uculano and Umberto Favero's love for Wittenoom, they came as a surprise. When I finally spoke with them, I was even more surprised that they had lived there until 2002. Six other participants spoke of their visits to Wittenoom to see where as children or adults they had spent part of their early days in Australia. My visit in 2010 to the breathtaking Pilbara with Emilia Oprandi, the daughter of one of the first Lombard miners recruited in early 1951, went some way to explaining the connection and attraction many of the Wittenoom Italians still feel for the place years later. We had all gone to Wittenoom despite the now known health dangers. Emilia and I had made our decision based on the knowledge that mesothelioma takes decades to develop; we would be dead from old age before we developed the disease.

Participants' narratives have described both the positive and negative consequences of their time in Wittenoom. Chapter Eight illustrated how life changed for the worse as

asbestos-related diseases took hold: those who had left Wittenoom with the early signs of asbestosis gradually became more infirm and died. A significant number of those who had left in a state of good health, years later were diagnosed with mesothelioma, dying within 12 months. It has left many fearful that they could die the same way. Others have gone on with their lives, preferring to ignore the health consequences. For the first time, many Italians had saved substantial sums of money and made investments which have provided them with a comfortable lifestyle. In the 1960s public awareness concerning the extent of the company's knowledge and their strategy to cover up their negligence was still some 20 years away. Sick men alternated between work and convalescence as their health deteriorated. They had families to support, and at least wanted to provide a home for them.

Contrary to what I had expected, even where the memory of the loved one's passing due to an ARD was still uppermost in participants' minds, or when they considered the health consequences to themselves or other family members, their responses concerning the impact of their Wittenoom experience proved to be complex. The rancour I had expected to colour their stories was almost always absent. Intertwined with the grief and loss and the feelings of betrayal by ABA Limited and CSR was their appreciation for the friendships they had made, the idyllic childhood they had experienced and the sense of community they had helped to create in the town. The more distant the memory of their lives in Wittenoom and the passing of loved ones were the more tempered their attitude to the company appeared. Their own thinking was philosophical, possibly influenced by their religious beliefs and the acceptance of hardship and the inevitability of death.

Chapter Nine reveals what was known about asbestos-related diseases in Australia from the early 1920s onwards. The Motley Rice documents suggest CSR's and the Department of Mines complicity in ignoring the available scientific knowledge on asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. CSR in fact monitored the growing number of industrial diseases as several items of CSR correspondence contained in the Motley Rice documents reveal. This is at odds with various court transcripts of CSR executives' evidence on what they knew regarding the dangers. The Commonwealth and more particularly the Western Australian government sanctioned CSR's behaviour at Wittenoom by failing to instruct the

Department of Mines to enforce the Mines Regulation Act. The Mines Inspectors reports and the Department of Health's ongoing representations expressing their concern about the health consequences of asbestos exposure were ignored at all levels of government.

The stated reason for Wittenoom's closure in 1966, ABA Limited's financial losses of \$2.5 million, needs to be reconsidered in the light of the available evidence. In the late 1950s, ABA director, C.H. Broadhurst, acknowledged CSR's participation in asbestos price fixing. By that time James Hardie was purchasing half of Wittenoom's asbestos production. Wittenoom's closure in 1966 came at a time when, despite the known hazards, global sales in asbestos were on the increase. In the 1960s, despite fluctuating sales, CSR's reports suggested optimism regarding future sales. Realistically, nonetheless, they could not compete internationally: South Africa's production and labour costs, helped by the country's apartheid policy, were considerably lower than CSR's. Given that CSR was monitoring the number of industrial diseases at the mine and would have been aware of international events such as Dr Irving Selikoff's 1964 conference on asbestos attended by nearly 400 delegates, the reason for the mine's closure may have been influenced by the possibility of future litigation and their inability to determine the future number of mesothelioma cases.

Media scrutiny in the early 1970s and the growing numbers of mesothelioma deaths confirmed the company's worst fears about damages claims. It no doubt prompted the name change of Australian Blue Asbestos Limited to Micalco to remove any association with asbestos. In the face of \$2.5 million dollar losses reported in 1966, the removal of \$7 million dollars from the un-liquidated ABA Limited's account, replaced with a \$100,000 loan in 1975, raises the question why \$7 million was held in ABA Limited account for so long after the mine's closure. By 1977 the company's clandestine gathering of some 20,000 documents on Wittenoom and legal advice led them to the conclusion that they were negligent, culminating in their decision to shelter behind Micalco's limited liability. In the early unsuccessful damages claims which began with Joan Joosten's claim in 1979, CSR, nonetheless, supplied only 30 documents during the course of legal discovery. Moral conscience and the sense of responsibility to Wittenoom's workers saw the leaking of evidence in 1988 proving CSR's negligence. Conscience had proven stronger than loyalty to the company at the moment

when CSR would have finally been protected by the statute of limitations, rather than having to pay out the hundreds of millions of dollars in damages claims CSR has paid out to date in the US and Australia. The whistle blower remains unidentified, but must have come from CSR's senior ranks.

In 2010, CSR's proposed demerger and subsequent sale of its sugar interest, Sucrogen, sparked considerable concern among asbestos support groups in Australia, in light of the James Hardie move off shore in 2001 and by 2003 the bankruptcy of the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation established by James Hardie to pay future asbestos damages claims. Treasurer Wayne Swan, in approving the sale of Sucrogen, put in place several independent checks despite CSR's assurances that it would meet its future asbestos claims with the \$1.6 billion proceeds of the sale. It does, however, remain to be seen whether Wayne Swan has gone far enough to protect the interests of future asbestos victims.

In the twenty-first century, the asbestos story goes on. Several developments relevant to the unaddressed question of criminal negligence in the global asbestos history have been heartening, while others continue to raise concern. In February 2012, in northern Italy a Turin court sentenced two former members of the Swiss asbestos company, Eternit – Stephan Schmidheiny, the former owner of Eternit, now in his sixties, and Baron Jean-Louis Marie Ghislain de Cartier de Marchienne, a major shareholder and now 82 years old — to 16 years jail. The judge concluded that both men and Eternit were responsible for having caused an environmental disaster and failing to comply with safety regulations, which resulted in the asbestos-related deaths of over three thousand employees and residents. An international asbestos corporation had finally been held accountable for its inaction in the face of workers' occupational health and safety. While most Western countries had banned asbestos by the early years of the twenty-first century, the Canadian government only withdrew its support for the country's asbestos mines in late 2012. In contrast, developing Asian countries such as India and the powerful economies of China and Russia still mine asbestos and export products containing the fibre. Of concern for Australians was the news

that a Chinese gasket containing asbestos went undetected by Australian Customs in 2010. Consequently, the importance and significance of this research cannot be undervalued.

The dangers associated with asbestos exposure did not end with the closure of the Wittenoom mine. The recording of the Italians' history serves also to educate unsuspecting people of the dangers of asbestos. The presence of asbestos in Australian homes, public places and products highlights the need for ongoing warnings in the media to keep the dangers of asbestos exposure in the public domain, and help avoid the development of more cases of asbestos-related disease. This is something the Gillard government in 2010 seemed to want to address with the commissioning of the "Asbestos Management Review". From the review's recommendations Bill Shorten, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, announced in September 2012 the establishment of an Office of Asbestos Safety to develop a national approach to asbestos management and the reduction of asbestos exposure. The outcomes remain to be seen. In any case, the implementation and policing of asbestos management plans will have its pitfalls, not unlike the monitoring of the working conditions at Wittenoom by the Mines Inspectors and the failure of the Department of Mines to enforce the Mines Regulations Act.

Importantly, this research has given a voice to thirty-six participants either as Italians who were knowingly exposed to the dangers of asbestos at Wittenoom or as surviving family members of deceased Wittenoom workers. Their accounts undoubtedly exemplify the stories of the thousand other Italians I was unable to reach — either because they have already died or due to time constraints of the research. The recording of their social history in this thesis acknowledges their disproportionate contribution to Australia's economic growth in the post-war period.

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that CSR and the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments have all contributed to the deaths reported in the Wittenoom population, as well as those which have and will continue to emerge in the Australian general population and anywhere else blue asbestos was sold in the world. Yet, unlike the Eternit owners, CSR was never held to account over their negligence. While many of the Wittenoom Italians achieved *sistemazione*, its achievement has come at a price: the

Italians would never have agreed to work in Wittenoom or taken their families had they been informed of the irreversible health risks.

Select Bibliography

Arrangement of the Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Oral Histories

Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits

Archival Sources

Official Publications

Unpublished Papers

2. Secondary Sources

Newspapers

Periodicals

Official Publications

Books and Articles

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Valvasori, Fulvia, interviewed by Angela Di Pasquale, 27 October 2009, Perth.

Vojakovic, Robert, interviewed by Angela Di Pasquale, 2 December 2010, Asbestos Diseases Society, Perth.

Motley Rice Plaintiffs' Exhibits

Motley Rice is a North American asbestos litigation legal firm which supplied Prof Jock McCulloch with digitised copies of over 600 items, including archival documents from government, CSR and other sources pertaining to asbestos and the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine. Prof McCulloch passed these on to the author of this thesis. These documents are available on request from Prof McCulloch, with Motley Rice to be acknowledged as their source.

Exhibit no: 10095: List of ABA Company directors, 27 December 1949.

Exhibit no.10119.00: list of books on mining, asbestos and related topics, drawn up by the CSR Library, 3 June 1943.

Exhibit no.10131: K.O. Brown's report to CSR on inspection of Yampire Gorge asbestos mine, 1 December 1944.

Exhibit 10133: Correspondence from ABA Limited to the Western Australian Employers Federation, 14 February 1957.

Exhibit no. 10140: Malcolm King, 1949, 'Report on Inspection of Cape Blue Asbestos Limited, Union of South Africa to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company'.

Exhibit no: 10142: Letter from Managing Director CSR to the Secretary ABA Ltd Perth, 10 September 1943.

Exhibit no. 10144: Tariff Board's Report on Asbestos Fibre, 24 March 1955.

Exhibit no. 10146: C. T. Oliver, secretary AWU's correspondence to J. Foxall, State Mining Engineer, 19 April 1948.

Exhibit no. 10147: Extracts from CSR Board Minutes (1943-1967 inclusive) concerning the Wittenoom asbestos venture.

Exhibit no. 10151: Australian Workers' Union Hearing, 9 June 1949.

Exhibit no. 10162: Letter to the Minister for Industrial Development from ABA Limited's General Superintendent, 28 August 1963.

Exhibit no. 10166: Letter, from C.W.R. Powell, CEO of ABA Ltd, to the President of Johns-Manville, Mr. Crosby, dated 4 August 1944.

Exhibit no. 10168: The Managing Director's correspondence to the Wittenoom manager regarding 'Mine Matters', 27 September 1948.

Exhibit no. 10170: Letter from C. H. Broadhurst, Wittenoom manager to ABA Limited Engineer in Perth. 14 April 1949.

Exhibit no. 10177: Letter from Managing Director to Wittenoom manager, 12 March 1952.

Exhibit no. 10179: Letter from Managing Director to Wittenoom manager, to give approval to attend the Mining and Metallurgical Conference in Melbourne, 16 April 1952.

Exhibit no. 10188: Letter from ABA Limited to C. Broadhurst re Dry Process Plant, 20 April 1956

Exhibit no. 10191: Letter from C. Broadhurst, Director ABA Limited to the Premier of W.A. Re Production, 7 June 1957.

Exhibit no. 10195: Malcolm King's letter to director re Costs, 7 October 1959.

Exhibit no. 10196: Letter from C. Broadhurst to ABA Limited General Superintendent, Re: Fibre Sales: Mr. Thomas' report on markets, 17 January 1962.

Exhibit no. 10205: Correspondence from C.H. Broadhurst Pro General Manager to Manager ABA Perth, 1 December 1966. Re list of companies advised of Wittenoom's closure.

Exhibit no. 10206: Certificate of Incorporation of a Proprietary Company. Australian Blue Asbestos Pty Limited, 22 December 1960.

Exhibit no. 10223: Memo from the Secretary of Mines to the Minister of Mines, 7 February 1950.

Exhibit no. 10224: Senior Inspector of Mines letter to the State Mining Engineer, Department of Mines, 17 July 1951.

Exhibit no. 10225: Correspondence from Thomas, acting ABA manager at Wittenoom to District Inspector of Mines. Steps taken to eliminate dust. 21 June, 1955.

Exhibit 10229: O. A. Allan and A. N. Marr, 1957, 'Report on visit to Rhodesia and South Africa to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company'.

Exhibit no. 10231: C. H. Broadhurst's letter to the Managing Director, Australian Blue Asbestos Limited. Topic: Mine Staff. 6 September 1946.

Exhibit no. 10232: Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1958.

Exhibit no. 10234: CSR Profit And Loss Account for the year ended 31 March 1960.

Exhibit no. 10237: Minutes of Meeting of Directors of Australian Blue Asbestos Limited.

Exhibit no. 10241: Extracts of CSR Board Minutes (1 January 1943 - 30 June, 1987).

Exhibit no. 10246: The Inquiry into Asbestos Issues at Wittenoom by Hon. Mark Neveill and Alan Rogers, for the Western Australian Parliament, 1 August, 1992.

Exhibit no. 10251: In the Supreme Court of Western Australia. Heard 19 November, 1987 to 14 July 1988. Delivered 4 August, 1988. No. 1148 of 1987 BETWEEN STEPHEN EDWARD JAMES TIMOTHY CHARLES IRVIN BARROW, Plaintiff and CSR LIMITED, first defendant and MIDALCO PTY LTD, second defendant and no. 1161 of 1987 BETWEEN PETER HEYS, Plaintiff and CSR LIMITED, first defendant and MIDALCO PTY LTD, second defendant (By original action) and BETWEEN CLAYTON PETER HEYS, as Administrator with the will annexed of the estate of PETER HEYS deceased.

Exhibit no.10252: Transcript of the Four Corners programme, 'Blue Murder'. ABC journalist Paul Barry accompanied to Wittenoom by ex-Italian miner, Rolando Sabbadini.

Exhibit no. 10256: State Mining Engineer Foxall's letter to AWU Secretary, T. Oliver, 10 May 1948.

Exhibit no. 10261: District Inspector of Mines, J. Boyland's report to the State Mining Engineer on his visit to Wittenoom on the 19 and 20 January, 14 February 1950.

Exhibit no. 10268: Letter from the State Mining Engineer to the District Inspector of Mines, 9 May 1950.

Exhibit no. 10272: J. Boyland Report on recent inspections of Northwest and Kimberley, 25 May 1952.

Exhibit no. 10278: Mines Inspector J. Boyland writing to the State Mining Engineer, 28 June 1956

Exhibit no. 10287: AWU, AEU, ETU and the Boilermakers unions writing to the District Inspector of Mines, 3 February 1958.

Exhibit no. 10289: C. Reen, AWU representative writing to Mines Inspector Hunt, 5 March 1958.

Exhibit no. 10292: Mines Inspector A. W. Ibbottson writing to Senior Inspector of Mines, 3 April 1958.

Exhibit no. 10293: Letter from J. Boyland, Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer, 9 April 1958.

Exhibit no. 10305: Mines Inspectors Ibbottson and Hunt writing to the Wittenoom mine manager, 9 October 1958.

Exhibit no. 10307: C. H. Broadhurst, Director, writes to the Managing Director ABA Limited, Sydney with the questions and answers given in the W.A. Legislative Assembly on asbestos-related diseases, 16 September 1958.

Exhibit no.10312: Dr Henzell, Director of the Tuberculosis Branch writing to Commissioner of Public Health, 1 June 1948.

Exhibit no. 10313: Letter from Dr Saint to Dr Cook, Commissioner of Public Health, 6 June 1948.

Exhibit no.10314: Memo from Dr Linley Henzell to the Minister for Health, 20 February 1950.

Exhibit no. 10318: Letter from Commissioner of Public Health, L. Henzell, to the Under Secretary for Mines, 26^t October 1951.

Exhibit no. 10325: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr D. D. Letham. Re: asbestosis and x-ray classifications in Wittenoom workers, 29 January 1959.

Exhibit no.10327: Dr Jim McNulty writing to Dr King, 13 January 1960.

Exhibit no. 10328: Dr McNulty Chest Physician and Mines Medical Officer writing to General Manager State Government Insurance Office (Western Australia) 17 March 1960.

Exhibit no. 10351: West Australian: Asbestos Mine was Too Dusty, 6 October 1961.

Exhibit no. 10353: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr Rennie, 25 October 1961.

Exhibit no. 10364: Letter from Department of Mines, A. J. Murphy to Dr McNulty, Re: dust counts and temperatures, 24 June 1965.

Exhibit no. 10376: Letter from the Minister for Health to the Minister for Mines, 4 March 1960.

Exhibit no.10386: Letters from Wittenoom mine manager, O. Allan to General Superintendent Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Perth, 24 June 1960.

Exhibit no. 10407: Senior Inspector Boyland writing to State Mining Engineer regarding ventilation in the mine and mill. 19 September 1960.

Exhibit no. 10438: Letter from Wittenoom manager to the General Secretary, Chamber of Mines of W.A. Re: Ventilation at Wittenoom, 6 October 1961.

Exhibit no. 10441: Memo dated 12 October 1961 to Under-Secretary of Mines from State Mining Engineer Brisbane, re October 10 1961 meeting held in State Mining Engineer's office.

Exhibit no. 10442: Memo dated 13 October 1961 from Under-Secretary of Mines to the Minister for Mines, re October 10 1961 meeting held in State Mining Engineer's office.

Exhibit no. 10444: Meeting pm 10 October 1961 in Mr Brisbane's Office, Mines Department, Perth.

Exhibit no. 10447: Letter from Wittenoom manager Allan to Managing Director ABA Limited, Sydney, Re: a recent visit from the Senior Inspector of Mines who expressed his appreciation at the improvements made to the underground ventilation. 18 October 1961.

Exhibit no. 10450: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to Wittenoom manager, 6 November 1961.

Exhibit no. 10453: O.A. Allan writing to ABA General Manager regarding proposed improvements in the mine. 17 November 1961.

Exhibit no. 10454: Letter from Wittenoom manager to Senior Inspector of Mines. 20 November 1962.

Exhibit no. 10455: Letter from ProManaging Director ABA Limited, Malcolm King to General Superintendent ABA Limited, Perth. 30th November 1961.

Exhibit no. 10457: Letter from A. W. Ibbottson, District Inspector of Mines to Wittenoom manager. Re Under the provisions of the Mines Regulation Act, the District Inspector of Mines is going to put a limit on the daily tonnage allowed into the mill. 6th December 1961.

Exhibit no. 10466: Meeting pm 8 January, 1962 in Mr Brisbane's Office, Mines Department, Perth. This meeting was reported by Mr Thomas, ABA Limited's General Superintendent to the Wittenoom Manager. Re: Meeting was held between the Representatives of ABA, the Mines Dept. and the Health Dept.

Exhibit no. 10474: Letter to State Mining Engineer from Senior Inspector of Mines Re: Proposed prosecutions – Australian Blue Asbestos Limited. 5 April 1962.

Exhibit no. 10476: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer – Ventilation – Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd Wittenoom. 11 April 1962.

Exhibit no. 10479: Letter from Senior Inspector of Mines to State Mining Engineer — Ventilation Report – June 1962 — 20 July 1962.

Exhibit no. 10483: Letter to the Wittenoom manager: Re: conditions throughout the mine have deteriorated considerably since the last inspection. 25 July 1962.

Exhibit no. 10489: Letter from the District Inspector of Mines to Senior Inspector of Mines, 13 October 1962.

Exhibit no. 10496: ABA Wittenoom: Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis), 18 September 1963.

Exhibit no. 10503: Ventilation Report for 1963. A. Mulholland, 8 January 1964.

Exhibit no. 10507: Letter from the District Inspector of Mines (Port Hedland) to the Senior Inspector of Mines. 25 February 1964.

Exhibit no. 10518: Letter from Dr McNulty to J. Boyland: Re Dust is still obviously a problem. 25 October 1965.

Exhibit no. 10524: Thermal Precipitator. 31 March 1966.

Exhibit no. 10554: Penrose, K. E. (1963), The ABA Story.

Exhibit no. 10571.0: Report from C. Adams, Inspector of Mines, Cue, to the State Mining Engineer, Perth regarding the Western Australian Blue Asbestos Company. 24 October 1945.

Exhibit no. 10578: A. E. Lloyd District Inspector's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer. 26 November 1948.

Exhibit no. 10593: District Inspector A. E. Lloyd's report on Wittenoom to the State Mining Engineer. 13 October 1950.

Exhibit no. 10633: Letter from J. M. Faichney to State Mining Engineer on Ventilation in ABA mine at Wittenoom, 15 August 1953.

Exhibit no. 10645: C. H. Broadhurt's report of his visit to Europe and North America. 1 November 1956.

Exhibit no. 10647: Report on Asbestos Wittenoom, from Company Secretary J. F. Blaxland to General Manager. 29 April 1977.

Exhibit no. 10651: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 1922, An Index to Health Hazards in Industry.

Exhibit no. 10652: Meeting re: Wittenoom claims. In attendance were CSR directors; J. F. Blaxland (who prepares the report), Malcolm King, R.W. Harvey and F. N. Lewis. 29 April 1977:

Exhibit no. 10653: Workers' Compensation Act, Dangerous Industrial Diseases and Diseases Arising Therefore. 8 March 1935.

Exhibit no. 10654: Workers' Compensation Reports: pp. 129-132, in the Workers' Compensation Commission of New South Wales — Jones vs James Hardie and Co. Ltd., 1939.

Exhibit no. 10660: The Medical Journal of Australia, Vol 11, 37th Year, 25 November 1950.

Exhibit no. 10666. The Report of the Commissioner of Public Health for the year 1959 – presented to both Houses of the Western Australian Parliament.

Exhibit no.10668: Letters from Wittenuom mine manager, O. Allan to Managing Director Australian Blue Asbestos Limited, Sydney. 24 June 1960.

Exhibit no: 10673: Letter from Dr McNulty to Dr Rennie: Re: The mill at ABA the Mines Department Inspector report to me that the mill was dirtier than ever, despite a reduced ore production. 6 February 1963.

Exhibit no. 10674_01: Memorandum to the General Superintendent ABA Ltd, Perth, See under Health Matters. 28 March 1963.

Exhibit no. 10674_05: Some questions and answers concerning Bulletin Cover Story: "Is there a killer in your home?" 6 July 1974.

Exhibit no.10711: The Catalogue of the Scientific and Technical Periodicals in the Libraries of Australia, 1930.

Exhibit no.10712: The Australian Institute of Librarians, Ninth Annual Report, October 1946, Melbourne University Press, 1947.

Exhibit no. 10714: the Quarterly published by the Library Association of Australia, vol 8, April 1959.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 82. Letter from Dr. McNulty, Chest Physician and Mines Medical Officer, Kalgoorlie, to the Manager of the State Government Insurance Office of W.A. 17 March 1960.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 102, Professor of Pathology, R. E. J. ten Seldan, at Perth Hospital is writing to the Health Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Henzell about his concerns. 18 April 1958.

Exhibit no: 10722: slide no. 121, Memo from the Under Secretary for Mines to the Commissioner for Public Health. August 1951.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide no. 133, Copy from File M.D. 523/49, Inspector Boyland is reporting to the State Mining Engineer on his visit to Wittenuom with Workmen's Inspector Hunter. 19 June 1950.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 134, The State Mining Engineer's letter to the Secretary of Mines regarding an inspector's recommendations for improvements at Wittenuom. 1 March 1950.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 141, Memo from the Minister for Mines to Minister for Health. December 1949.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 142, Copy to the Minister of Health from the Minister for Labour of Memo from the Secretary of Labour to the Minister for Labour regarding extending operations of the Factories and Shops Act. 20 December 1949.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 151, Dr Henzell reports to the Commissioner of Public Health, on x-rays. 26 July 1948.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 158, ABA Limited engineer G. P. Wallace writing to Dr Henzell, Director of the Tuberculosis Branch. 14 May 1948.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 159, Letter to Acting Commissioner of Public Health from Senior Commonwealth Medical Officer, W.A. 16 February 1948.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 160, Letter from Acting Commissioner of Public Health to Senior Commonwealth Medical Officer, W.A. 13 February 1948.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 161, Memo from Dr Linley Henzell, Director of Tuberculosis Branch, to the Commissioner of Public Health. 3 February 1948.

Exhibit no. 10722: slide 162, Report on asbestos prepared by the Government Chemical Laboratories for the Commissioner of Public Health of Western Australia. January 1948.

Exhibit no. 10723: Response to Minister [for Mines] from Director General of Mines, D. R. Kelly regarding correspondence from the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia and lawyers Lavan Solomon regarding the location of relevant Department of Mines files re Wittenoom. 21 November 1984.

Exhibit no. 10739: Re CSR (& ABA & SGIO)/Slater and Gordon Agreement with CSR's lawyers.

Exhibit no. 10828: Australian Blue Asbestos Pty. Ltd. 29 September 1966.

Exhibit no.10881: Commissioner of Public Health replies to Dr Saint's letter. 16 June 1948.

Exhibit no. 10887: Marrero Plant News Bulletin, Wednesday, announces the visit of Sydney CSR officials Mr K. O. Brown and Dr. P. A. Hanks to the Johns-Manville Marrero Plant, Louisiana. 6 May 1959.

Exhibit no.10903: Re: mineral claims. Both C.S.R. and A.B.A. have by frequent visits abroad endeavoured to build up the market for blue fibre. 14 September 1959.

Exhibit no. 10904: Johns-Manville internal memo: CSR executive's visit. 28 May 1963.

Exhibit no. 10907.00: J.V. Sparks, 1932, 'Pulmonary Asbestosis', The Medical Journal of Australia, (March), p. 338 (Abstract).

Exhibit no. 10908.00: Johns-Manville memorandum, 18 April 1952. C. V. Miller to various executives re: Johns-Manville representative, C. D. Borrer's visit to Australia.

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