

John Sulston

1942-2018

Book of celebration

I was privileged to work in the same lab as John at the Sanger Centre in the 1990s. I found John to be an inspirational man. He was incredibly kind and a pleasure to speak with. He always made me feel valued.

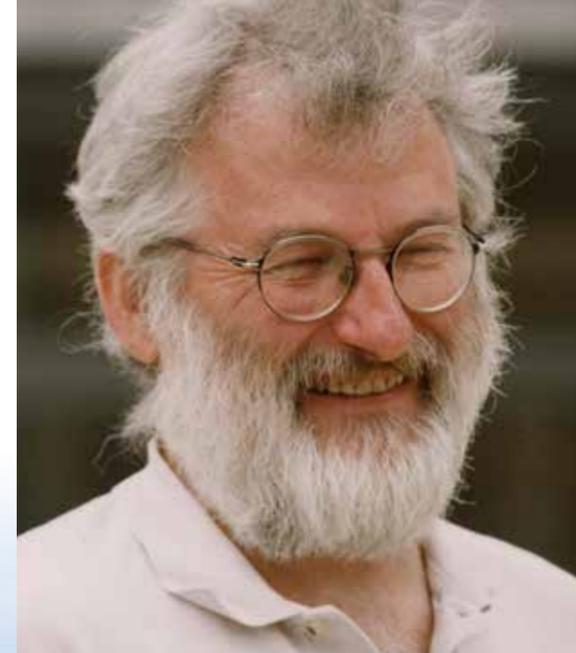
I have a very fond memory of showing some colleagues at the time the results that can be produced with dry ice and soap to create a 'snake of foam' (admittedly, not work related) - when John's voice came close behind me - 'are you having fun Emma?'

Some years after leaving the Sanger Centre, I bumped into John at a pub. He asked me if I was still having fun.

Decades later, I have often thought of contacting John to express my thanks. My health has not been perfect and I have to take Biologics to be able to move. Because of John's work - drugs like this have been quicker in the making and available on the NHS. Thanks to John - I am still having fun.

It amazes me to think of all the people like me, who have been and will be helped by John's work - now and for all time. In addition, he was such a decent and respectful person. I am sure will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

EMMA PLAYFORD (BACK THEN!)



I first met John Sulston in 2002 when The Common Thread was published.

He had lunch with a bunch of us PhD students during the Edinburgh Book Festival. I was in awe, but he was so friendly, down-to-earth and appeared to be entirely without ego.

I've since met many more super star scientists - Sirs & Dames, Nobel Laureates and the fixtures in glamour mags - and now realise how rare those characteristics were. I met John Sulston three times more, and each reinforced my first impression.

DARREN LOGAN

Others can amply attest to his brilliance, but he was also one of the best & nicest people I knew.

SARAH CHAN

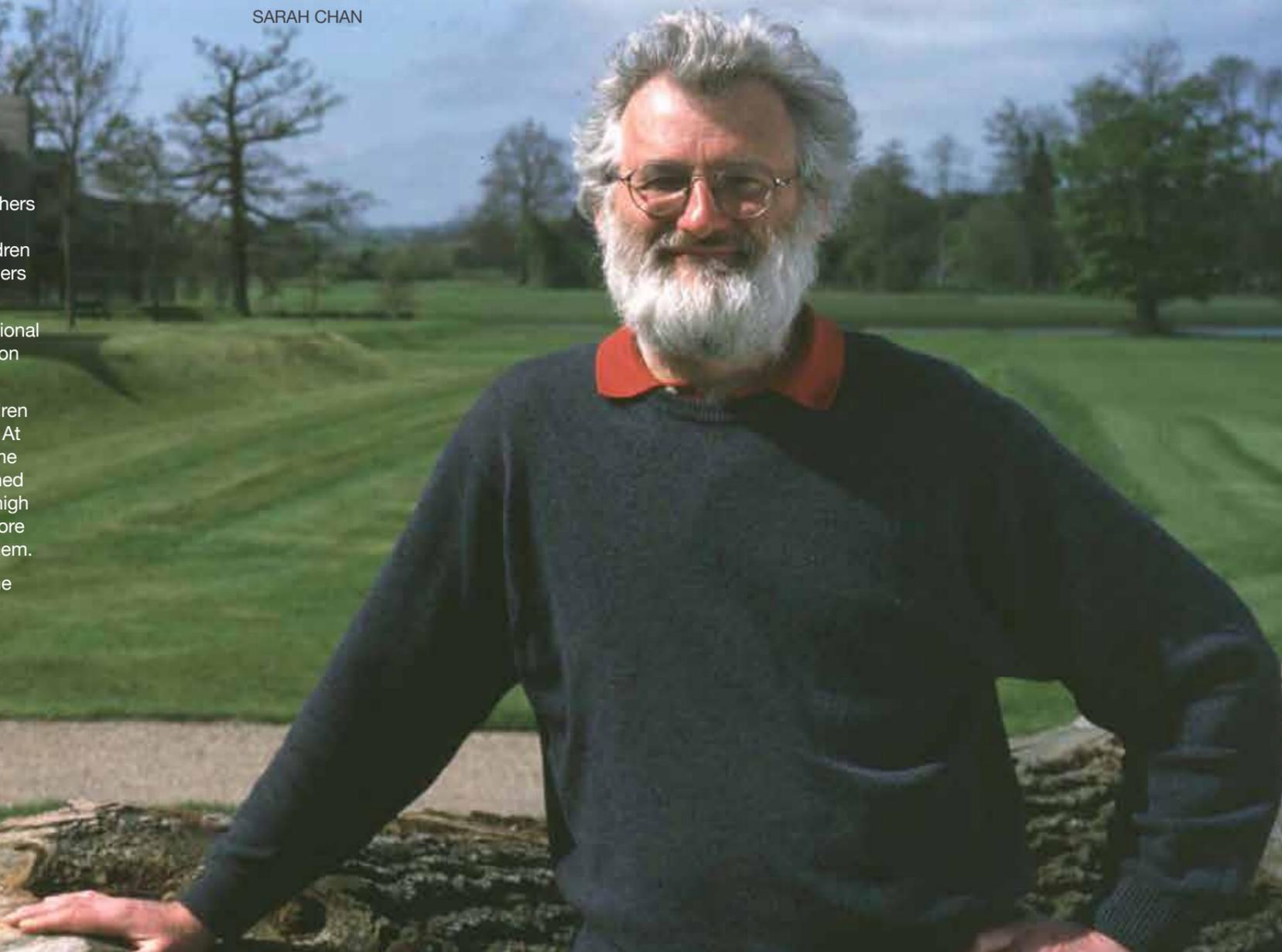
When doing my PhD I joined a scheme called Researchers in Residence. This allowed me to travel to several UK science museums and work with teams of school children who were competing in regional competitions (2x winners of the presentations and 2x winners of the posters).

The winners would get the chance to compete in a national final at the Royal Society and be judged by John Sulston and Robert Winston amongst the judging panel.

At the final I was asked by a group of Irish school children if I could ask John to speak with them (as I knew him). At the time John was conversing with a gentleman of some seniority but when John got to know that children wished to speak with him, he unceremoniously offloaded the high level gentleman in favour of the children - who were more than excited and enthralled! He made their event for them.

Just a symbol of the humility and humanity that was the essence of John.

RHIAN GWILLIAM





I remember John from his work establishing the EBI at Hinxton, and his early championing of open data as the Human Genome Project progressed.

Not only was his *C. elegans* work beautiful and truly groundbreaking, he was - on the wider stage - brave, decent, straight-speaking, grounded and entirely genuine. His integrity shone through.

He was an inspiration then, and will continue to be so, even now that he is no longer with us.

RACHEL DRYSDALE



Sir John Sulston was a remarkable, humane man, who wanted to make sure that scientific knowledge was open to all, for the benefit of everyone. It was a privilege to have known him.

LINDSAY NORTHOVER

I was lucky enough to meet Sir John Sulston a few years ago and he struck me as someone who wore his intellect v lightly but always with passion.

LISA ANDRES

Thankful I got to enjoy his talks, chatting with him at conferences, and doing a karaoke rendition of California Dreaming with him in Japan.

Brilliant, funny, and down-to-earth. We've been dealt a hard loss.

LAURIE GOODMAN

Very sad to hear about the death of John Sulston - a great scientist but above all a lovely, warm and kind human being.

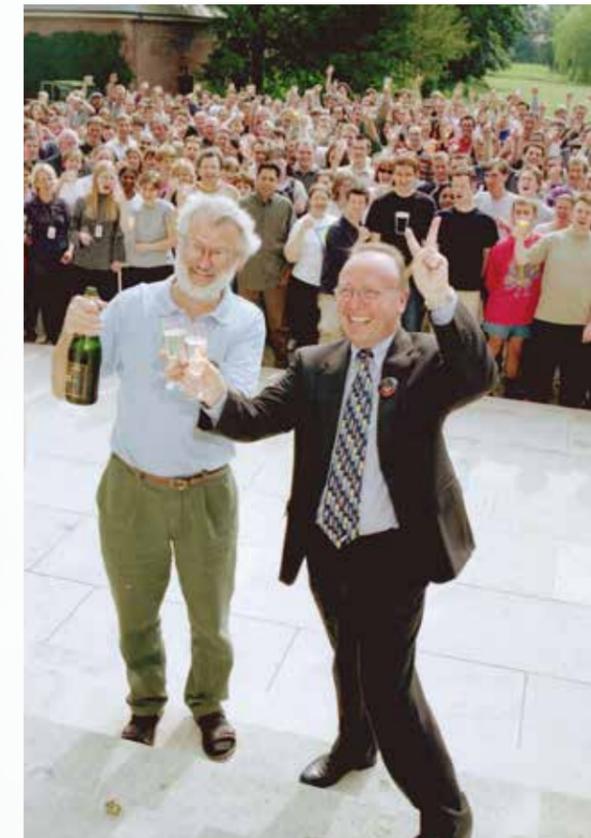
John made the world a better place.

MARIO CACCAMO

John Sulston once bought me a drink in the Red Lion. He didn't have to. I was 23.

In an era of ever increasing egos and tiresome silverbacks, he had the rare ability to be a groundbreaking scientist and genuinely nice chap.

STEPHEN BAKER



Very sad to hear of the death of Sir John Sulston. I was lucky enough to edit his book The Common Thread, and he was both brilliant and a delight to spend time with.

At the time the Observer wrote: 'Our nation is much the richer for Sulston's existence.'

SIMON THOROGOOD



What an inspirational scientist. John used a *significant* fraction of his Nobel prize winnings to form a charity that funds undergrads from LMICs to do short research projects at Sanger.

Do you know what he called it? The Sanger Prize.

Generosity & humility!

CARL ANDERSON

Sir John Sulston gave a lecture to my class at university while I was an undergraduate. He was so inspiring!

LILAC ROSE

Thinking about Sir John Sulston this evening: extraordinary scientist and wonderful human being. His creativity and vision knew no bounds - utter triumph of substance over spin.

Huge influence on my career. Will be hugely, hugely missed.

ALISON WOOLLARD

The spirit of John Sulston will be sadly missed - brilliant scientist, man of principle.

Great discussions at Human Genetics Commission.

VERONICA VAN HEYNINGEN

I worked with John only temporarily, but he was always so kind and thoughtful, and treated people the same regardless of their position in an organisation.

He was also the most perceptive and commanding meeting chair that I have seen, despite his quiet and polite nature.

SOPHIE JANACEK

Really liked John Sulston. A kind man as well as a brilliant one. RIP.

TOM SHAKESPEARE

Feeling very sad, but so proud to have worked with this truly inspiring leader. John leaves a legacy of open access and the truest sense of team spirit. With him we sequenced the human genome, overcame the deepest floods, had the best parties and lit the largest fires...

John taught us how to do world-changing science. An inspiring leader who knew everyone by name, who shared every accolade with his team, and whose legacy lives on.

CORDELIA LANGFORD

I only met Sir John once but he was extremely kind and generous with his time. I have never forgotten that one conversation with him.

TOBY SEDDON

Very sad to hear Prof John Sulston has died. I used to see him coming through the Hinxton back door on Saturday mornings. Great man.

SABINE ECKERT

I worked a few removes under John Sulston at the Sanger Institute/Centre. He was absolutely lovely: a passionate scientist, a true humanitarian, fiercely dedicated to keeping Human Genome Project data in the public domain, and not private interests.

MATTHEW CRAIG

I spent several hours with John Sulston drinking beer and discussing ethics. A great loss.

RUTH STIRTON

I had the pleasure of having a meeting with Sir John at the Sanger Centre. Will never forget him explaining DNA on the whiteboard whilst above him the ticker tape scrolled the latest bit of decoded human genome.

JASIA WARREN



A lot has been said and written about John's science and beliefs and I don't need to add to these. However I do want to highlight that John also had a less serious side to his personality and a wicked sense of humour.

One expression of this was through his support for and participation in the annual Sanger pantomime. He actively promoted this event as a way to bring the staff of the early Sanger Centre together, and was a very willing and able performer. He joined in with gusto and was happy to accept the mild mocking that was required for someone in his elevated position.

I looked through some of the old scripts and found an example where we presciently predicted his future fame by crowning him "King Arthur of Sangalot, Protector of the Genome Campus, Lord of one third of the genome, Ruler of all Hinxton, quite well known in Ickleton, Infamous in Gt. Chesterford and barely heard of in Saffron Walden" and had him just missing out on the "Ikea prize for Physiology and Medicine".

John also liked his real ale, and I had the privilege of spending several long evenings in my local pub with him, finishing only when the time bell had rung and he had to get onto his racing bike and cycle back home. He was always an amusing and entertaining conversationalist. Sometimes he would be profound, sometimes less so.

I will always remember one occasion, when after a few rounds and discussing what we could do to improve the Sanger pantomime, he roared "there's not enough sex in it!" shocking the locals enjoying their quiet drinks.

The next year's script was considerably more bawdy than we had risked in the past.

IAN DUNHAM

It was a such a pleasure to work with John, I will always remember him as the most humble kind man whose charisma shone through. I can imagine how embarrassed he would be reading these messages of admiration, but so well deserved. Sir John Sulston you will be sorely missed.

SARAH COSSEY

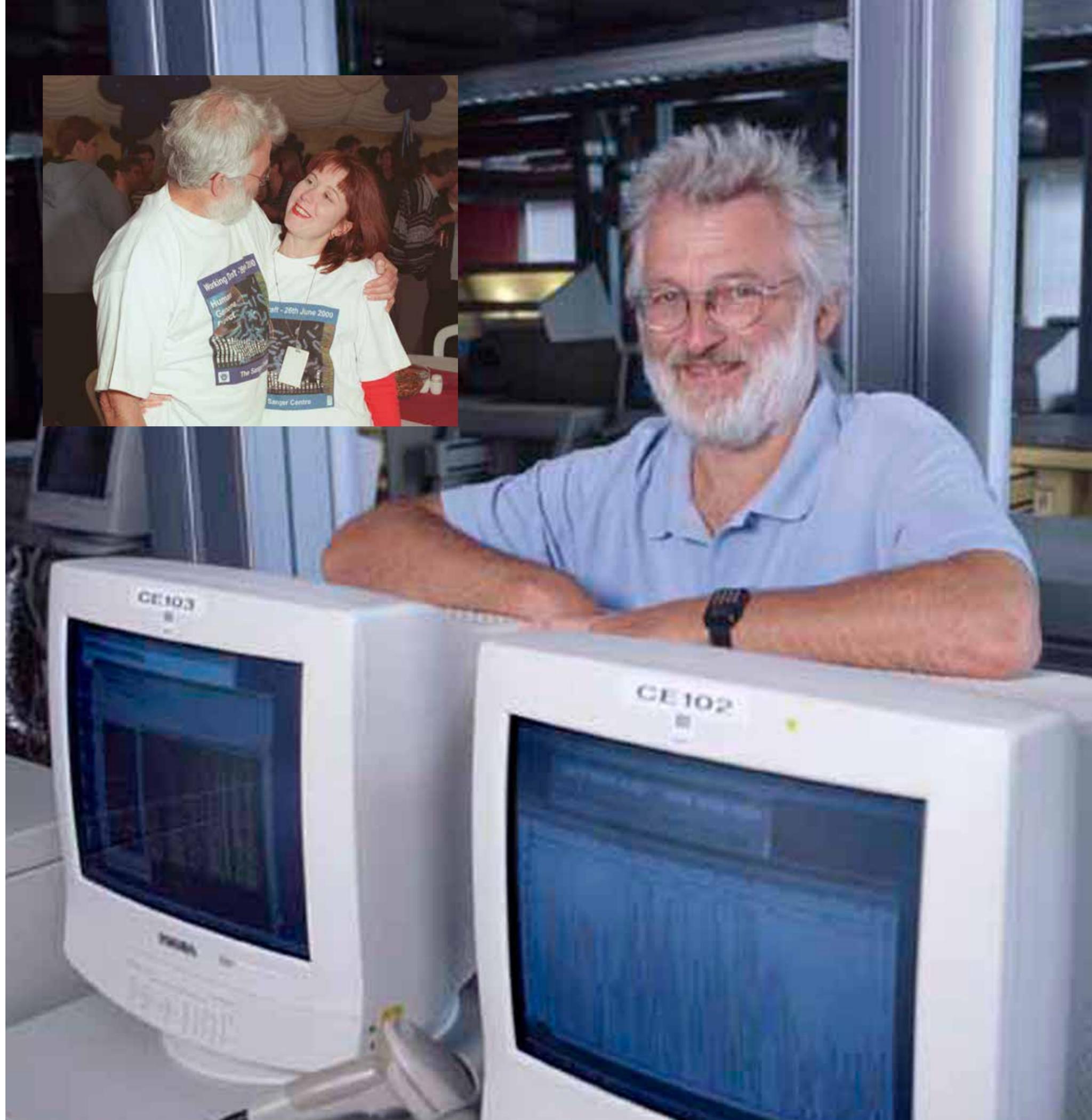
Terrible to hear of the death of John Sulston. A huge influence and inspiration to me and many others. He changed the course of scientific research twice, for C.elegans and genomics, in a way very few have done.

Great strength of vision, and focus, to deliver selflessly for all.

RICHARD DURBIN

I had the honour of Sir John Sulston demolishing my argument on genetics and insurance back in 2004.

JAMES MITTRA





John was so kind to me when we were at ISEI in Manchester and has been ever since, and I am very sad to think we won't speak again. Probably the most interesting man I've ever known - and a great person to share an ale with.

DAVID LAWRENCE

A truly exceptional human being. I had the privilege of meeting him a few times. He did convince me to move BioModels to a CC0 model.

NICHOLAS LE NOVERE



It was such a privilege to have worked (and partied) under John's leadership at the Sanger Centre. Our Sanger-baby children were born during these times and John's memory will live on in our family through our conversations with them, and I'm sure with any Grandchildren we have.

Aside from all the scientific achievements and John's guidance altering old attitudes towards guarding "our" data, there is also the joy I felt seeing him perform with such gusto in the Sanger pantomime "King Arthur and the Holy Genome", wearing the knights outfit which I had originally made for my husband Ian Dunham to wear at fancy dress party.

And the occasion one son, then a babe-in-arms, decided he fancied a drink while I was holding him and talking to John at a Sanger Party, hence he "reached in" to reveal in full the source of said milk. Needless to say, John didn't bat an eyelid, just carried on talking, albeit with his eyes twinkling away a little bit more and an extra twitch at the corner of his smile.

Such things explain the huge shock and overwhelming sadness so many of us felt when hearing the news.

But only last week a hospital consultant, on seeing where I worked, asked what he was like to work for as a person, as he said he'd regretfully never had the chance to meet him. Hopefully I was able to do justice to John's unique style of leadership and inspiration.

LOTTE COLE

My first job out of uni was here and even though he had retired by then, Sir John Sulston was still very much the beating heart of the campus.

SARAH NICHOL

I have a story about Sir John. It's quite boring though! It was a Burns Night Supper and I danced with him. He almost gave me a Chinese burn and then almost threw me out the room. Strong man!

KATHY SEEGER

First met John Sulston at opening of Wellcome Sanger Institute while I was a PhD student. He embodied everything good about science. Father of the Human Genome Project & principles of Open Science, he remains a hero to me & many geneticists.

SAMIA SAAD



Great scientist whose painstaking work supported me during my PhD days....

He was incredibly humble too.

PRITTI MEHTA

I first met John Sulston in February 1993. There was snow on the ground and I had to park on the Addenbrookes' site and make my way to one of the buildings that made up the LMB (Laboratory of Molecular Biology now located in a brand new building on the much larger Biomedical campus) for an interview with John, Jane Rogers and Alan Coulson.

The interview was for a DNA Sequencing Team Leader. I described a method that I had been using to generate nested deletions for DNA sequencing in blue green algae. It was a method that John was not aware of at the time and he got me to draw a schematic of the way in which it worked on a white board in his office. I didn't get the Team Leader job, but I was offered (and took) a job making DNA sequencing libraries for the *C. elegans* (nematode worm) and human genome projects.

Late in 1994 John was involved in a serious motorcycle crash on the Sawston bypass and spent some time in hospital. Shortly after John's accident I was knocked off my push bike and suffered a fractured femur. I ended up on the same ward that John had recently been in. Because my family couldn't visit me on the Saturday John organised a meeting in the hospital ward that afternoon to discuss how my work could be covered during my recuperation. John arrived in a wheel chair and the ward staff were pleased to see how well he was doing.

When John and I were fit for work but not capable of traveling independently, we frequently shared a taxi: John was collected from Stapleford and then I was picked up in Sawston before both being dropped off in Hinxton. It must have been amusing to see both of us hobble into the old building on crutches.

The last time I saw Sir John would be just about 25 years after the interview at the LMB: he was cycling down Hillside in Sawston (as he did most Saturday mornings) on his way to Mary's greengrocers. Although I couldn't see his face, I'm confident that he would have been smiling and there would have been a twinkle in his eye. I can't imagine him looking any other way. He is rarely out of my thoughts.

MATTHEW JONES

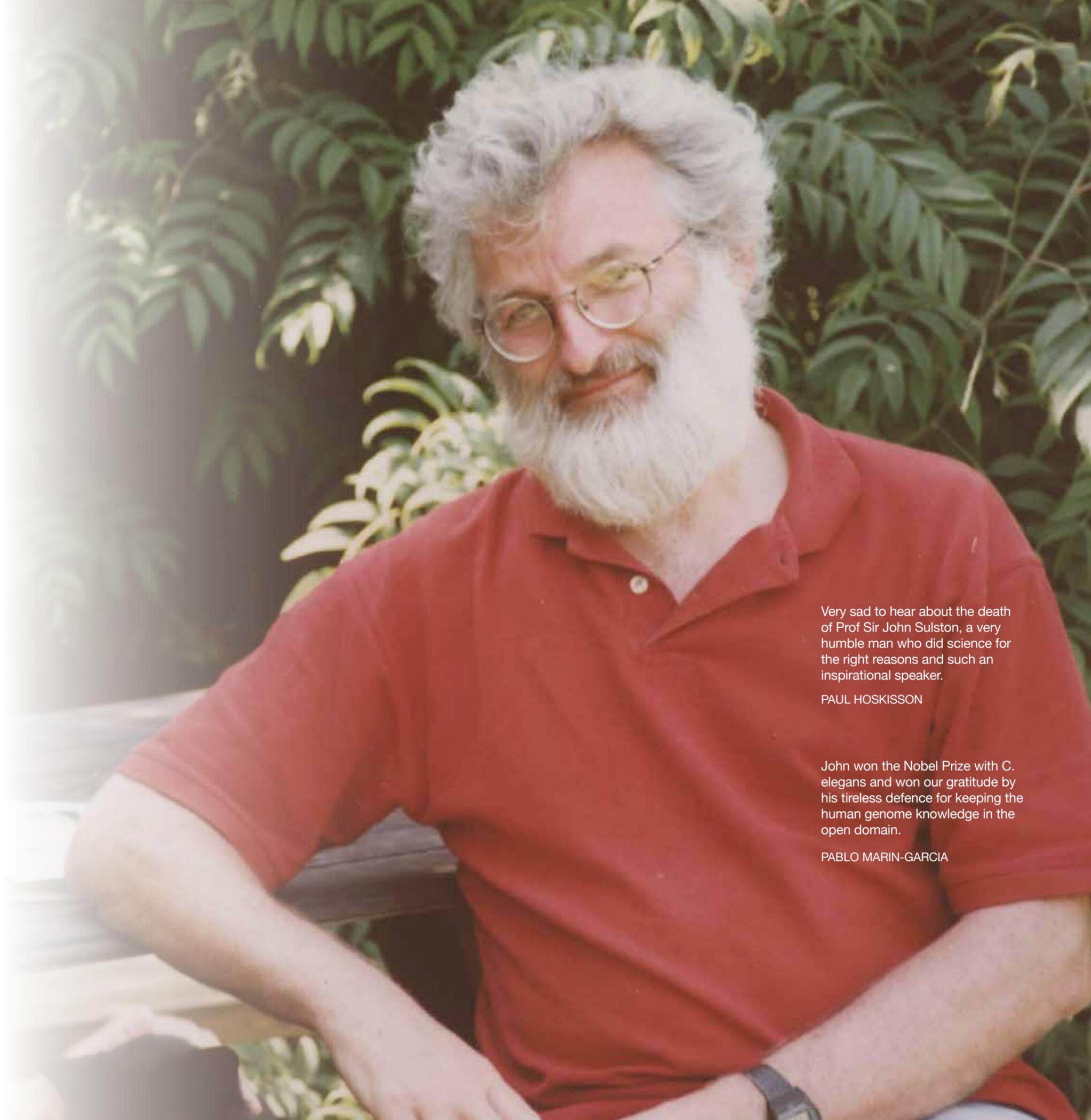
So sad to hear of the death of John Sulston: a scientist who could work on the finest of details to broadest strategy, truly committed to open Science for the world and a lovely and remarkable human - whether in a conference hall or the pub.

The world will miss him.

EWAN BIRNEY

Without a doubt I would not be where I am today without Professor Sir John Sulston. His fierce vision of open data and the human genome project stands was such a driving force behind where genomics is today. Sadly missed but will be remembered.

ANDY YATES



Very sad to hear about the death of Prof Sir John Sulston, a very humble man who did science for the right reasons and such an inspirational speaker.

PAUL HOSKISSON

John won the Nobel Prize with *C. elegans* and won our gratitude by his tireless defence for keeping the human genome knowledge in the open domain.

PABLO MARIN-GARCIA



Sir John Sulston visited National Institute of Genetics, Japan, like 6 years ago. I asked him what kind of books I should read. He answered that as a biologist, I should focus on microscope image data that I get rather than books.

RITSUYA NIWAYAMA

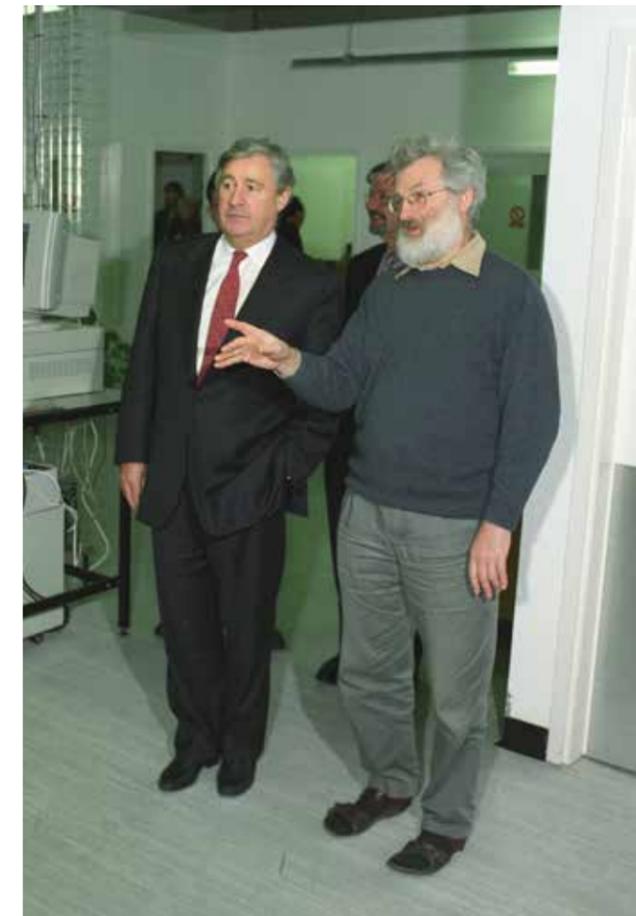
I'm a big advocate of open data and open science but its easy for me. John Sulston is a hero because he won a hard battle for us all with the human genome data despite all the personal attacks.

DAVE LUNT

I was very sad to learn that John Sulston has died. He was a great scientist and a wonderful man who supported open science and those working on access to medicines.

I still regularly share his group's "Manchester Manifesto - Who owns science"

ELLEN 'T HOEN



We mourn the passing of one of the founders of our field. John Sulston was personally responsible for establishing the use of *C. elegans* to study development – with his stunning determination of the entire embryonic cell lineage by direct observation – as well as obtaining a complete genome sequence.

He was a mentor and role model for many of us in the field who had the opportunity to work with him or know him personally, and an inspiration for many others who only knew him through papers and oral history.

He demonstrated that comprehensive and careful description can lead to fundamental, mechanistic insights into biology and genomes. John also exemplified being collegial, community-minded, intellectually rigorous, scientifically intense and personally friendly.

TODD HARRIS ON BEHALF OF WORMBASE

I met John Sulston some years ago. Pupils at a Leeds school wrote to him and asked him to come along and speak to them. To everyone's surprise he accepted.

Nobel Prize did not impact on his humility. Very sad that he has died.

GRAHAM LAPPIN

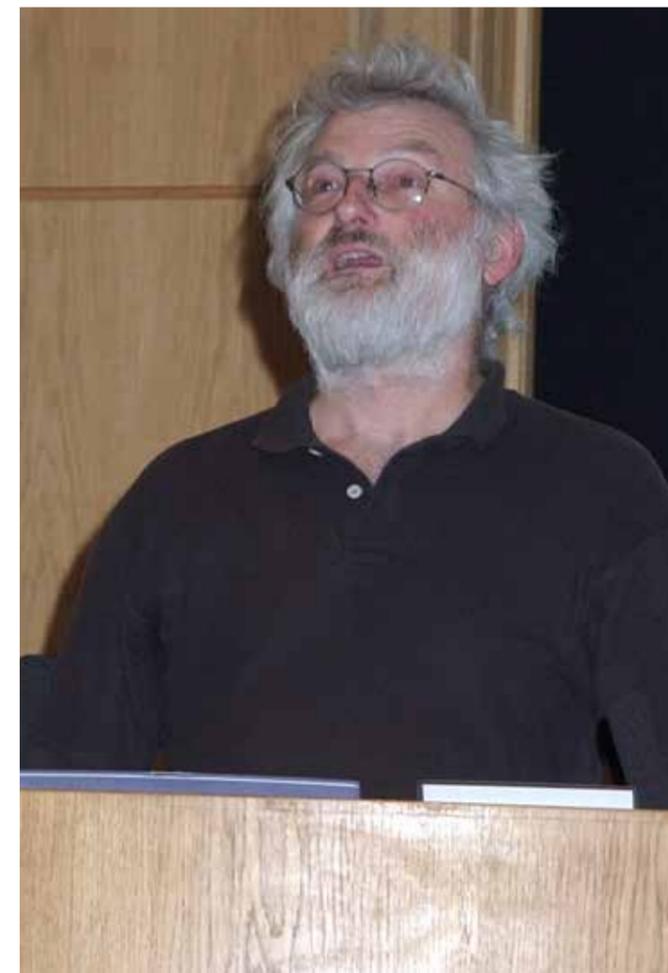
Knew him when I was a PhD student and he was a super-careful worm guy. It was a very great surprise to find him becoming this big shot.

He was fantastic.

ROBERT INSALL

A truly innovative and creative scientist that I had the honor of meeting several times! To top it off he was a staunch advocate for the science art movement!

AHNA SKOP



I am very sad indeed to hear of the death of Sir John Sulston, a wonderful scientist and deeply moral man who believed in the pursuit of science for the good of humanity.

May his knowledge, influence and ethos continue to ripple out.

ALICE ROBERTS

Very sad to hear that John Sulston has died. A giant of genomics who did as much as anyone to ensure the human genome was free for all humanity. And a great person too.

MARK HENDERSON



John Sulston gave his time and enthusiasm to CambridgePPF & Magog Down. Tributes focus on his genetics achievements & the Nobel Prize but this is how we knew him, checking on trees with our Estate manager. He epitomised "carpe diem" & we will in his honour.

WANDLEBURY WOODS

We are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Sir John Sulston, a pioneer and leader in genomics and an inspiration as a scientist and as a human being. He helped guide the Earlham Institute to where it is today as first ever chair of our SAB and a long time trustee. He will be greatly missed.

EARLHAM INSTITUTE

John chaired the Royal Society's People and the Planet Review. While neither an expert in climate change nor demography, he brought a meticulous scientific rigour to the review.

SARAH HARPER

I am pretty sure that John Sulston worked as a volunteer in the library we go to with the kids (unless it was a very convincing lookalike!). An unassuming nice bloke who would say hello whilst putting books back on shelves.

FRANCIS ROWLAND

Sad to hear of Sir John Sulston's death. He opened the Addenbrooke's to Shelford cycleway in 2006 & was active for some time in Sustrans.

HOPSNICHEESE



I went on a weird road-trip with him (and Davids Bentley & Vetrie) in the early 90s to work out where to put the Sanger Centre - Hinxton Hall was then just the hall and a grotty low-rise 70s factory building.

ROLI ROBERTS

I am deeply saddened to hear of the death of Sir John Sulston. He was one of the great scientists of our age, and fundamentally changed how we do genetics. We are all in his debt.

ADAM RUTHERFORD

John's receiving the Nobel prize coincided with the first week of my PhD at the Genome Campus in Cambridge. We crashed the party :).

Amazing contribution to genomics.

ADAM WOOLFE

Thanks to John's vision and passion we understand more about what we are as human beings. His work has allowed us to see more clearly how complex and beautiful we are. It reminds us there is more that unites us than divides us.

JES SANDHU

Every experiment in my thesis was made possible by John Sulston's (et al.) complete description of the cell lineage of *C. elegans*.

For thousands of hours at the microscope, I used his diagram of the worm's brain, color-coded with each cell's relation by descent to all others.

JAVIER APFELD

Shocked to hear of Sir John Sulston's death. Met him many times while he worked here at University of Manchester and was so impressed by his altruism, drive & deference.

MARTIN HUMPHRIES



My favorite person I ever worked for. Just a great scientist and human.

MARK METZSTEIN

I will always remember working with him when he came to At-Bristol for the Inside DNA launch and debate. I was a slightly terrified but he was kind and great.

RACHEL MURRAY



Inspirational & subversive: he was always one of my favourite FRS to work with the Royal Society.

JAMES WILSDON

I collaborated with him on an interactive artwork which visualised his work ten years ago. Lovely guy.

DANIEL BROWN

At my very first *C. elegans* meeting at CSHL in 1987, I was a lowly graduate student, but knew I was going to do my post doc in Bill Wood's lab. The lads over at the MRC-LMB had just published their big Laser-Scanning Confocal Microscopy paper (on the cover of *Cell*).

At lunch I sat at a table where John Sulston (future genome scientist extraordinaire, amongst many other accolades) was explaining the basic principles of the LSM to a Japanese colleague. He could tell that the other person wasn't quite getting the idea (which seemed pretty complicated to me, too), and very gently, without the slightest bit of condescension whatsoever, patiently explained it in different ways, making lots of time to spread this gospel as widely as possible.

No opinions, or bragging, or "style" whatsoever, just substance.

MARC PERRY

I remember listening to him explain that he always viewed people with firsts with suspicion, and interviewed them more harshly to find out whether they could have tried harder and got a 2:1.

Still good advice.

CANOCOLA

A humble and dedicated scientist who founded the Sanger Institute and did pioneering work on both *C. elegans* and genomics. I never met John Sulston but his contributions have made a huge difference to my personal scientific path.

HAYLEY M BENNETT

Was lucky enough to meet him a few years ago and he struck me as someone who wore his intellect v lightly but always with passion.

LISA ANDRES



Very saddened to learn about John Sulston's death. He was a lovely man: interesting and interested.

IAIN BRASSINGTON

I had the great privilege of meeting Sir John Sulston once. I was intimidated at the prospect but I needn't have been.

FRANKIE SHRAPNEL

I will always remember the excitement when SJS responded YES to our talk invitation "because grad students asked".

@BLAIRKGAGE

I'm part of the generation that remembers that you would have to pay to see parts of our own genome. This reason you can now just go to a webpage is very much down to John Sulston.

JIM R HUGHES

We were sad to learn of Sir John Sulston's death this weekend. He was a world-renowned scientist, and also campaigner for a better world to the very end. We are all so much better off for his commitment to kindness, reason, and equality.

HUMANISTS UK

I was fortunate enough to have him as one of my lecturers and his classes inspired so much thought-provoking debate.

MELISSA SURGEY



When I got busted for hacking in my first year of grad school, John Sulston let me off with a caution and a wise smile. Didn't know him well but his ethics & ideals loomed large over the Hinxtom genome campus. He famously once said scientists should earn less than garbage workers.

IAN HOLMES

The first event I was invited to when I joined The School of Physical Sciences in September 2018, was the Department of Chemistry, Cambridge Alumni Medal ceremony for Sir John Sulston. He was charming and incredibly patient when answering my questions (a non-scientist).

HOLLY E B TILBROOK

Honoured to have interviewed the great biologist, human genome pioneer & open data hero Sir John Sulston just after the genome was sequenced. A believer in making data freely available & science for the public good. A humble, brilliant man.

ELLA MCSWEENEY

What a loss to humanity. John Sulston, Human Genome Project and advocate for free access to scientific knowledge.

I am so grateful for his help in the Oxfam Cut the Cost of Medicine Campaign.

MOGHA KAMAL-YANNI

Profoundly saddened to learn of the death of Sir John Sulston, a great scientist, public intellectual, fierce advocate of securing scientific knowledge for public good, champion of public engagement, wise mentor and friend.

PETER MILLS

John Sulston gave me a fantastic and lengthy interview a few years ago on media reporting of human genetics & his role in the supposed 'race' for the genome.

A great example of a public scientist, open, reflexive, quotable!

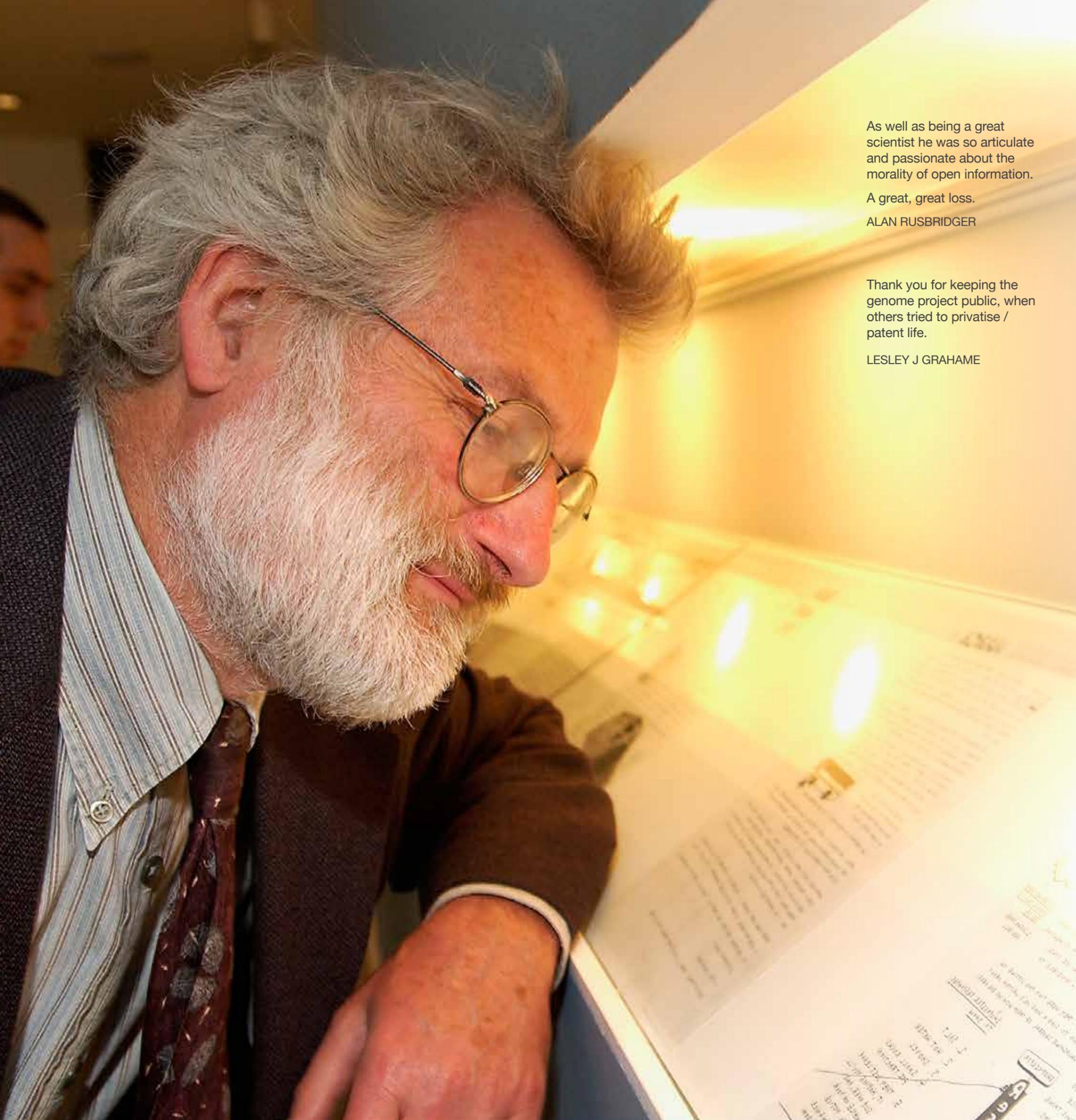
LESLEY HENDERSON

I couldn't have done my PhD without his work.

KYLA H

John Sulston was a hugely influential figure in the international *C. elegans* community, and was key in the establishment of a publicly funded human genome sequencing initiative. He was a generous and humanitarian scientist.

JONATHAN PETTITT



As well as being a great scientist he was so articulate and passionate about the morality of open information.

A great, great loss.
ALAN RUSBRIDGER

Thank you for keeping the genome project public, when others tried to privatise / patent life.

LESLEY J GRAHAME



John Sulston traced the cellular lineage of a tiny worm, curiosity-driven work which contributed to the discovery of the mechanisms of program cell death and a Nobel Prize.

The WormGUIDES project hugely influenced by his work, and most of us indebted to his beautiful work and vision.

DANIEL COLÓN-RAMOS

Very sorry to hear of the death of Sir John Sulston. He was a great man who fought to make human genome data open to all. Scientists in the US wanted to patent the DNA sequences but he took them on and made sure that the world had free access. We are all grateful to him.

ALISON NEWELL

As a graduate student, I loved hearing Jim Priess tell stories of working with John Sulston at the MRC.

ALEXANDRE A NEVES

With my focus at Sanger being the prokaryotes, it's not surprising that I didn't have much direct interaction with John Sulston. However, I always knew of John's reputation as a great and unselfish scientist and was proud to have him as "my leader".

His unselfishness and generosity meant that in 2002, when I was asked by the Society of General Microbiology to write a short article about the rise of genomics, I felt comfortable about just shooting the Director of the Sanger Centre an email asking for his ideas for useful analogies. John replied promptly to me, a junior analyst in his rapidly growing institute, with words of wisdom, shared with ease and openness.

His characteristics as a person and a scientist are an inspiration to all and provide a standard to which we should aspire.

STEPHEN BENTLEY



In the early days of the human genome project (and even up until recently) private companies wanted to patent and licence the human genome sequence. To make money. Not to drive research, but to line their pockets. John Sulston played a key role in thwarting them.

SHANE MCKEE

Nobel Prize winner John Sulston inspired a whole generation of geneticists, including me. Not only with his seminal discoveries but also with his relentless fight for making the human genome project public and accessible to all.

KHALID FAKHR

Not only was he a great Scientist's Scientist, his leadership and views on the human genome project helped shape a lot of the open access we take for granted with respect to -omics data.

ANTHONY BERNDT

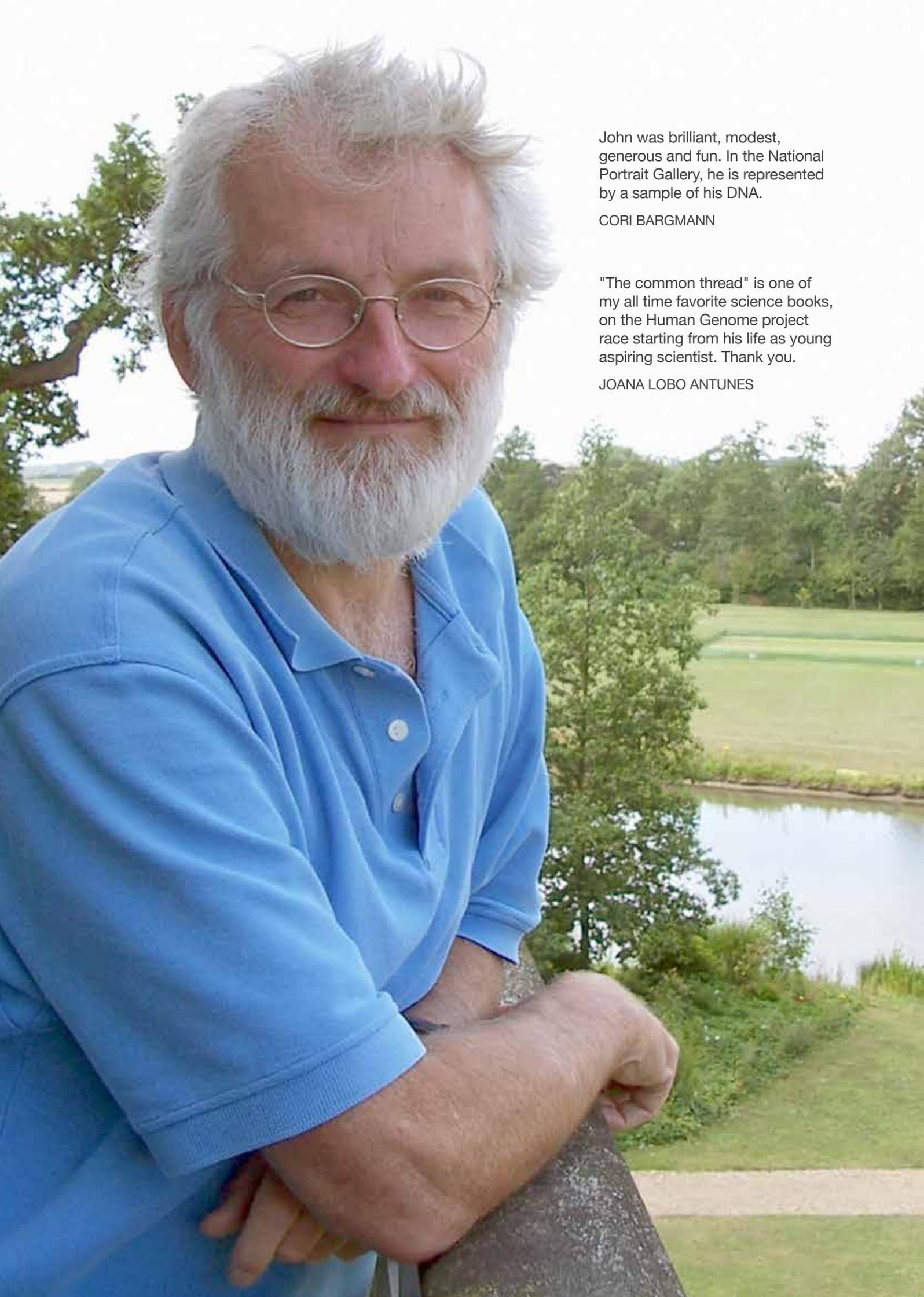
Although I joined the institute after John had left, I had the pleasure of meeting him at a an event in Cambridge. A very down to earth person. Ensuring that the human genetic data was made publically available will be his enduring legacy.

QASIM AYUB

A great colleague at the MRC-LMB and two decades later an honourable opponent over University of Cambridge IP policy.

DAVID SECHER





John was brilliant, modest, generous and fun. In the National Portrait Gallery, he is represented by a sample of his DNA.

CORI BARGMANN

"The common thread" is one of my all time favorite science books, on the Human Genome project race starting from his life as young aspiring scientist. Thank you.

JOANA LOBO ANTUNES