Ten Lives

Portraits of Mentors, Colleagues and Friends

Reflections on More than Forty Years in International Agricultural Research



MICHAEL JACKSON OBE

Contents

Preface i

Introduction 1

Part I – Mentors 2
Five scientists whose guidance helped shape my career

Joe Smartt 3

Jack Hawkes 6

Trevor Williams 10

Richard Sawyer 14

Klaus Lampe 18

Part II – Colleagues and Friends 22
Five remarkable people whose friendship enriched a lifetime in international agricultural research

Jim Bryan 23

Ken Brown 27

Gene Terry 30

John Sheehy 33

Eves Loresto 37

Afterword 40

About the Author 42

Preface

Science is often remembered through discoveries, publications and institutions. Yet behind every scientific achievement stand individuals whose encouragement, wisdom, friendship and example shape the careers of others.

This memoir is my tribute to ten such people.

Some were my teachers and mentors. They recognised potential that I did not yet see in myself, challenged me to think more deeply and opened doors that changed the course of my professional life. Others became valued colleagues and close friends whose companionship, advice and generosity enriched over my more than forty years in international agricultural research.

These portraits are not intended to be comprehensive biographies or formal obituaries. They are personal reflections drawn from memory and experience. Others who knew these individuals would undoubtedly tell different stories. What I have tried to capture are the qualities that made each of them memorable and the influence they had on my own life.

Although these portraits first appeared individually on my personal blog, they have all been substantially revised, updated and woven together here into a single memoir with a common theme.

Together, they span almost the whole of my professional journey—from my undergraduate years at the University of Southampton, through postgraduate study at the University of Birmingham, to my work with the International Potato Center (CIP) in Perú and Costa Rica, and later with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines.

This journey was never mine alone. My wife, Steph, whom I first met during our studies at the University of Birmingham, shared my years at CIP and has remained my companion throughout every stage of the career described in these pages. Together we had the privilege of working with colleagues in many other countries, sharing not only scientific challenges but also friendships that have endured throughout our lives.

Together, these portraits are my tribute to ten remarkable individuals, and my expression of gratitude for the lasting influence they had on my life and career.

Introduction

Every scientific career is shaped by people as much as by ideas.

When I began my professional life, I imagined that success in science depended primarily upon knowledge, hard work and opportunity. Experience taught me otherwise. Throughout more than forty years in international agricultural research and academia, I encountered individuals whose encouragement, wisdom, leadership and friendship altered the direction of my career in ways that I could never have anticipated.

My career took me from the United Kingdom to Perú, Costa Rica and the Philippines, and to many other countries around the world. I worked with farmers, students, technicians, scientists, administrators and policy-makers from a remarkable diversity of cultures and backgrounds. Each contributed something to my understanding of agriculture, science and, perhaps most importantly, people.

Among the many hundreds of colleagues with whom I had the privilege of working, ten stand apart. Five were mentors who influenced the course of my career at crucial moments. They opened doors, offered opportunities, challenged my thinking and encouraged me to pursue paths that ultimately defined my professional life. The other five became colleagues and close friends whose companionship, generosity and example enriched that journey over many years.

These portraits are therefore about much more than scientific achievement. They are about character. They celebrate curiosity, integrity, humility, trust, generosity and quiet service—the qualities that enable great institutions to flourish and successful careers to develop. Scientific knowledge advances through research, but scientific communities thrive because of the people within them.

The pages that follow are offered as a tribute to ten remarkable individuals who shaped my life in different ways. Their careers deserve recognition in their own right. My purpose, however, is a more personal one: to acknowledge the lasting influence they had on mine.

If there is a single lesson that emerges from these recollections, it is a simple one. Whatever we achieve professionally is rarely the result of our own efforts alone. We are all, in one way or another, shaped by those who teach us, encourage us, challenge us and walk beside us.

This is their story.

It is also, in part, mine.

Part I

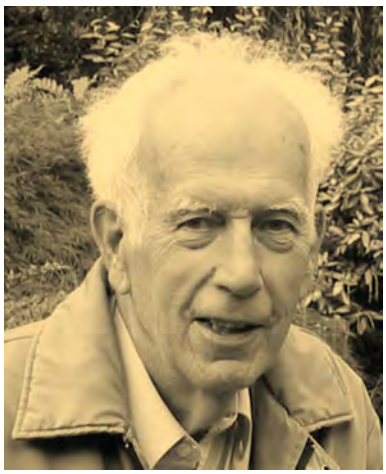
Mentors

Every career begins with opportunity, but opportunity alone is rarely enough. Most of us are fortunate, at some point in our lives, to encounter teachers and mentors who recognise possibilities that we do not yet see in ourselves. They encourage us, challenge us, open doors and, sometimes without realising it, alter the direction of our lives.

The five people in this section entered my life at different stages of my career. Joe Smartt first awakened my interest in plant genetic resources. Jack Hawkes provided the scientific foundations on which my career would be built. Trevor Williams taught me how to think more deeply about crop evolution and diversity. Richard Sawyer gave me my first opportunity to work internationally, while Klaus Lampe entrusted me with responsibilities that shaped my years at the International Rice Research Institute.

Each influenced me in a different way. Together, they transformed a young botanist into an international agricultural scientist.

JOE SMARTT



Few people influence the direction of one's life as profoundly as a good teacher and trusted friend. Joe Smartt was both. For more than four decades he was mentor, colleague, confidant and companion, and it was largely through his encouragement that I embarked on a career in plant genetic resources and international agricultural research. Only with the passing of time have I fully appreciated how much I owed him.

Joe died peacefully in Southampton on 7 June 2013, just three months short of his eighty-second birthday. Although his health had been declining for several years and he had moved into a care home towards the end of 2012, his death nevertheless marked the loss of someone whose friendship had been woven into my life for almost half a century.

I last visited Joe in July 2012. By then he was essentially bedridden, but that mattered little. We spent the afternoon doing what we had always done so well—reminiscing about old times over countless mugs of tea, a particular favourite of Joe's. Our conversation ranged effortlessly across science, music, friends and shared memories, and I left with the comforting feeling that, although physically frail, he remained unmistakably the Joe I had first met many years before.

A geneticist by training, Joe obtained his BSc from Durham University before taking a Diploma in Tropical Agriculture at the University of Cambridge. He then spent time in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) working on groundnuts before completing his PhD in the Department of Genetics at North Carolina State University in 1965. His doctoral thesis on the breeding relationships of peanut species foreshadowed a lifetime devoted to understanding crop diversity and its practical application.

In 1967 Joe joined the Department of Botany at the University of Southampton, remaining there until his retirement in 1996. Promoted to Reader in Biology in 1990 and awarded a DSc by the University the previous year, he became internationally recognised for his pioneering work on grain legumes. His books, review papers and edited volumes helped revive scientific interest in these important crops at a time when they were often overshadowed by cereals. Later in his career he surprised many by turning his attention to the genetics and breeding of goldfish, producing books that remain standard references among enthusiasts.

Although I entered the University of Southampton in 1967, I did not meet Joe until the following year, when he taught second-year genetics. By then, however, I had already made myself known to him through another shared enthusiasm.

In the autumn of 1968 we founded the University's first Morris dancing side, the *Red Stags*. What began as a mutual interest in traditional dance soon broadened into a shared love of traditional music, especially bagpipe music, and became the foundation of a lifelong friendship. Many happy evenings were spent listening to LPs from Joe's extensive collection, usually accompanied by a beer or, occasionally, a wee dram.



The Red Stags Morris dancers at a University of Southampton Open Day, March 1970. Joe Smartt is holding the hobby horse; Mike Jackson is crouching at the far right.

Joe's greatest influence on my life came in February 1970. Knowing of my growing interest in crop plants, he suggested that I apply for a place on the newly established MSc course in *Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources* at the University of Birmingham under Professor Jack Hawkes.

That simple piece of advice changed the course of my life.

It led directly to doctoral research, to my years with the International Potato Center (CIP) in Perú, and ultimately over forty years in international agricultural research and

academia. Much of my professional life can be traced back to that single conversation with Joe.

Yet what I remember most is not his scientific reputation but his character. Joe was physically an imposing man, but one of the gentlest people I have ever known. I saw him mildly irritated from time to time, but never genuinely angry. He possessed a remarkable equanimity that seemed to put everyone around him at ease.

Joe married Pam in 1970, and together they raised two daughters, Helena and Fran, whose achievements gave him enormous pride. In our correspondence over the years he wrote warmly of them, and I know their success brought him great comfort during the difficult years when his own health was failing.

Joe made lasting contributions to science, particularly through his work on grain legumes, but those who knew him will remember much more than his publications. They will remember his generosity towards students, his quiet encouragement, his enthusiasm for music and conversation, and his unfailing kindness.

Friends like Joe come along only a few times in one's lifetime. I count myself extraordinarily fortunate that he was one of mine.

JACK HAWKES



If Joe Smartt first pointed me towards a career in plant genetic resources, it was Jack Hawkes who opened the door. Teacher, supervisor, mentor and eventually colleague, Jack shaped my scientific career more profoundly than anyone else. Without his encouragement and guidance, I would never have gone to Perú, become involved in potato research, or spending those years working in international agricultural research.

I first met Jack in February 1970 when he interviewed me for a place on the recently established MSc course in *Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources* at the University of Birmingham. At the time I could scarcely have imagined how influential he would become in my life. After completing the MSc, I remained at Birmingham to undertake doctoral research on potatoes under Jack's supervision, and subsequently with Dr Roger Rowe at the International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima acting as co-supervisor. More than a decade later, in April 1981, I returned to Birmingham as a lecturer in Plant Biology, succeeding Jack in many of the teaching responsibilities he relinquished on his retirement the following year. Few academics are fortunate enough to follow quite so directly in the footsteps of their mentor.

Jack Hawkes was one of the outstanding botanists of the twentieth century. Born in Bristol in 1915, he attended Cheltenham Grammar School before winning a place at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with First Class Honours in Natural Sciences in 1937. His doctoral studies under the distinguished potato breeder and historian Dr Redcliffe N. Salaman FRS marked the beginning of a lifelong fascination with potatoes that would establish his international reputation. Cambridge later awarded him the ScD in recognition of his scientific achievements.

His career, however, might easily have taken a different direction.

Soon after graduating, Jack joined an expedition being organised to explore the potato-growing regions of the South American Andes. Although the original plans changed because of the ill health of the expedition's organiser, a revised expedition finally left for South America in 1938. That journey changed Jack's life. It also transformed scientific understanding of the diversity and evolution of cultivated potatoes.



Jack Hawkes (centre right) with expedition leader E. K. Balls (centre left), their driver and expedition assistant, near La Paz, Bolivia, in 1939.

Preparing for the expedition, Jack travelled to Leningrad to consult Russian potato specialists S. M. Bukasov and S. W. Juzepczuk. During that visit he met the great Russian geneticist Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov, an encounter he later described as one of the defining moments of his career. Jack always spoke of Vavilov with enormous admiration, regarding him as one of the giants of twentieth-century biology. He also met Trofim Lysenko, whose rejection of Mendelian genetics and political influence under Stalin led to one of the darkest episodes in modern science. Jack never disguised his contempt for Lysenko, describing him as "a politician rather than a scientist", and was deeply saddened by Vavilov's subsequent persecution and death.

The 1939 expedition was only the beginning. Over the following decades Jack returned repeatedly to South and North America, collecting wild potatoes and studying their relationships. His meticulous taxonomic research laid the foundations for our modern understanding of potato diversity and became indispensable to breeders seeking useful characteristics in wild species. Working closely with the Danish botanist J. Peter Hjerting, he also produced major monographs on the wild potatoes of South America that remain important references today.



Collecting wild potatoes with Jack Hawkes in the Andes north-east of Lima, March 1975.

Yet Jack's influence extended well beyond potatoes.

He was among the pioneers who recognised that the world's crop diversity was disappearing at an alarming rate and that the systematic conservation of plant genetic resources was urgently needed. Working alongside Sir Otto Frankel, Erna Bennett, Jack

Harlan and others, he helped shape the emerging international movement that eventually led to the establishment of a worldwide network of genebanks. Those ideas transformed agricultural research and today underpin global efforts to safeguard crop diversity.

Jack's commitment to education was every bit as important as his research. Shortly after becoming Mason Professor of Botany at Birmingham in 1966, he began to develop an international MSc course in *Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources*. When the course began in 1969, nothing comparable existed anywhere in the world. During the next four decades it trained well over a thousand scientists from more than one hundred countries, many of whom went on to lead national and international genetic resources programmes. I count myself fortunate to have been among its earliest cohorts.

As a supervisor, Jack demanded high standards but gave his students remarkable freedom to develop their own ideas. He rarely solved problems for us; instead, he asked the questions that forced us to solve them ourselves. In retrospect, I came to appreciate just how much confidence he placed in his students, encouraging us to tackle challenges that often seemed beyond our experience.



12 December 1975: With Jack Hawkes at my University of Birmingham graduation.

His confidence in me changed my life.

Through Jack I became involved with CIP, first as a doctoral student and later as a member of staff. Those years in Perú opened opportunities that I could never have anticipated and shaped the international career that followed. Even after I joined the Birmingham staff, Jack remained a valued adviser and friend. Although we had once been teacher and student, our relationship gradually evolved into one between colleagues, united by shared scientific interests and deep mutual respect.

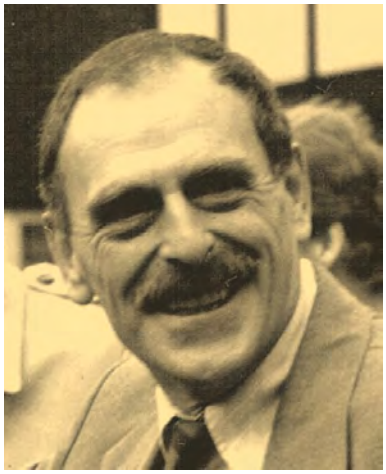
Like many gifted scientists, Jack received numerous honours during his career. He was awarded the Linnean Medal, appointed OBE, served as President of the Linnean Society of London, and received international recognition from organisations ranging from the American Genetic Association to the N. I. Vavilov Institute in Russia. I always had the impression, however, that what pleased him most was not the honours themselves but the knowledge that his work had helped establish plant genetic resources as an important scientific discipline.

Following his retirement in 1982, Jack remained scientifically active for more than twenty years. His memoir of the 1938-1939 expedition, *Hunting the Wild Potato in the South American Andes*, published in 2004, revealed not only the scientist but also the young adventurer whose curiosity had first drawn him into the Andes more than sixty years earlier.

After his wife Barbara's death in 2005, Jack left the family home in Harborne and moved to Reading to be closer to his children. He died there in September 2007 at the age of ninety-two.

When I think of Jack today, I remember not only an internationally respected botanist, but the teacher who changed the direction of my life. His influence can be traced through generations of students and colleagues working around the world, many of whom, like me, owe far more to him than can ever adequately be acknowledged. If my own career has achieved anything of lasting value, a considerable part of the credit belongs to Jack Hawkes.

TREVOR WILLIAMS



There are people who change the course of your career by opening doors, and others who change it by encouraging you to walk through them. Trevor Williams did both. During more than forty years our paths crossed repeatedly, from my days as an MSc student at the University of Birmingham to our shared involvement in the international plant genetic resources community. Throughout that time I came to admire not only his scientific vision but also his remarkable ability to inspire those around him.

Trevor died peacefully at his home on 30 March 2015 at the age of seventy-six. His passing marked the loss of one of the architects of the modern international plant genetic resources movement and of a friend whose influence on my own career was profound.

When I joined the one-year MSc course in *Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources* at the University of Birmingham in September 1970, Trevor had only recently been appointed Course Tutor by Professor Jack Hawkes. Still a young academic himself, he already possessed an infectious enthusiasm for plant taxonomy and evolution that quickly captivated his students.

Short, stocky, energetic and almost perpetually accompanied by a cigarette, Trevor always seemed to be in motion. His lectures on taxonomic methods were among the most stimulating on the course. They convinced me that taxonomy was far more than the naming of plants; it was an essential tool for understanding crop evolution and diversity.



With Trevor Williams at my MSc graduation in December 1971 at the University of Birmingham.

It was therefore an easy decision to ask Trevor to supervise my MSc dissertation.

Together we searched for a suitable topic. Working our way through the genera of the Fabaceae in *Flora Europaea*, we eventually reached *Lens*. Beneath the cultivated lentil, *Lens culinaris*, appeared the deceptively simple statement: "Origin not known."

That settled it.

What had begun as an afternoon's browsing became the foundation of my dissertation and one of my earliest pieces of research. We assembled seed samples from as many parts of the world as possible, attempting to

unravel the diversity and origins of one of humanity's oldest cultivated crops. Only later did I realise that Trevor was teaching me something far more important than lentils. He was teaching me how to formulate a scientific question.

My wife, Steph, also came under Trevor's supervision the following year, studying growth and reproductive strategies in grain legumes. In those days the Department of Botany was a close-knit community, and Trevor's enthusiasm and accessibility made him enormously popular with students.

Although he supervised relatively few doctoral students, one of them was Brian Ford-Lloyd, who would himself become one of Britain's leading authorities on plant genetic resources. Their pioneering work on the genus *Beta* helped establish Brian's distinguished scientific career.

Trevor's own academic background was unusually broad. After reading Natural Sciences at Selwyn College, Cambridge, he completed his doctorate at the University College of North Wales under Professor John Harper, one of the founders of modern plant population biology. Later, he undertook advanced studies in phytosociology in Switzerland, bringing together ecology, taxonomy and evolution in ways that would strongly influence his later work.

His greatest contribution, however, came after he left Birmingham.

Around 1977 Trevor became Executive Secretary of the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR), an organisation still in its infancy. Those were exciting years. Around the world, scientists were becoming increasingly aware that traditional crop varieties and their wild relatives were disappearing at an alarming rate. IBPGR became the catalyst for a global effort to collect, conserve and document that diversity before it was lost.

Trevor was ideally suited to the task.

He possessed a rare combination of scientific credibility, organisational ability and diplomatic skill. Under his leadership, IBPGR supported collecting expeditions across the world, strengthened national genebanks and invested heavily in training. Hundreds of young scientists were given opportunities to study and develop careers in plant genetic resources, many through the Birmingham MSc course that Trevor himself had once helped to teach.

The international community of plant genetic resources specialists that exists today owes much to those formative years.

Although our careers later took different directions, our paths continued to cross.

In 1989, when Birmingham celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the MSc course, IBPGR sponsored a reunion and refresher course for former students in both Birmingham and

Rome. Trevor returned to celebrate the remarkable success of a course that had exceeded even its founders' expectations.



Trevor Williams with former MSc students from eleven countries at the course's twentieth anniversary celebration, November 1989.

Later, during the 1990s, he helped establish the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) in Beijing. By one of those coincidences that seem common in international agricultural research, we unexpectedly met again in a hotel in Beijing while I was visiting China from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). What began as a chance encounter developed into one of those memorable evenings of conversation over several beers, talking about science, old friends and the extraordinary journeys our careers had taken since Birmingham.

The last time we spoke was early in 2012. Trevor telephoned to congratulate me on my appointment as an OBE in the New Year Honours List. We talked for more than half an hour, catching up on family, colleagues and mutual friends. During that conversation he mentioned that his health was beginning to fail. Neither of us imagined that it would be our last conversation.

Trevor combined intellectual rigour with genuine generosity towards younger scientists. He expected high standards but gave encouragement freely. Many of us working internationally owe a considerable debt to his guidance, whether we realised it at the time or not.

His contribution extended far beyond his own research. By helping establish the international network of genebanks and encouraging the training of a generation of

scientists, he helped create much of the infrastructure on which global plant genetic resources conservation now depends.

When I remember Trevor, I think less of the institutions than of the man himself: energetic, enthusiastic, endlessly curious and always willing to encourage a younger colleague. His friendship enriched my professional life for more than four decades, and I remain deeply grateful that our paths crossed when they did.

RICHARD SAWYER



Every career has its turning points. Mine came in January 1973 when, at the age of twenty-four, I arrived in Lima to join the International Potato Center (CIP). Waiting there was the man who had offered me my first professional appointment—Richard Sawyer.

Richard became much more than my first boss. He was mentor, supporter and friend, and although we occasionally disagreed, sometimes quite vigorously, I never lost my respect for him or for the vision that transformed a small international institute into the world's leading centre for potato research.

Richard died at his home in North Carolina on 9 March 2016, just one week short of his ninety-fourth birthday. His passing prompted me to reflect on how profoundly he had influenced my own career and, indeed, the development of international potato research.

Our paths first crossed in the summer of 1971 while I was studying at the University of Birmingham. My supervisor, Professor Jack Hawkes, had recently returned from a collecting expedition to Bolivia supported by the North Carolina State University–Perú Potato Project, which Richard had directed from Lima since 1966.



Richard Sawyer (second from left) with CIP staff outside the first laboratory in La Molina, December 1972.

During a visit to Britain to seek support for the fledgling CIP, Richard travelled from London to Birmingham to discuss training links with Jack and the University's MSc course in *Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources*.

Jack invited me to meet him.

I can still remember walking into Jack's office and seeing Richard for the first time. With his neatly trimmed goatee beard, he looked exactly like my mental picture of well-known American icon.

"Good grief," I remember thinking, "I've come to meet Uncle Sam."

That first impression proved entirely misleading.

Behind the imposing appearance was a warm, approachable man who immediately put a young scientist at ease.

Richard was looking for someone who could spend a year in Perú while a young Peruvian scientist, Zósimo Huamán, came to Birmingham to study for his MSc. That temporary appointment became the beginning of my international career.

I arrived in Lima in January 1973 expecting to stay for only a short time. Instead, I remained with CIP for the next eight years—years that proved among the happiest and most professionally rewarding of my life.

Those early days at CIP were very different from today's large international research centres. The organisation was still small enough for the entire staff to gather in Richard and Norma Sawyer's apartment in San Isidro for a welcoming reception during my first week in Perú. Richard had recently remarried, and he and Norma were eagerly awaiting the birth of their son, Ricardo Jr. The atmosphere was informal, friendly and optimistic. Everyone believed they were building something important.



Richard and Norma Sawyer with their son Ricardo in Lima, 1974.

Soon afterwards we travelled to Huancayo for a workshop on potato taxonomy and genetic resources. Richard drove one of the vehicles himself, and the evenings were spent in the Hotel de Turistas enjoying pisco sours and spirited games of *dudo*. Looking back, those occasions helped create the sense of camaraderie that characterised CIP during its formative years.

Richard believed passionately that scientists should work hard, but he also believed they should have lives beyond the laboratory. Every afternoon, almost without fail, he was first

out of the office and onto the *frontón* court. He was intensely competitive, but always seemed happiest surrounded by colleagues and friends.

His greatest strengths as a leader were vision and confidence.

He understood that the conservation and effective use of potato genetic resources had to lie at the heart of the new institute. Under his leadership the germplasm collection became one of CIP's defining strengths, while research expanded steadily into breeding, pathology, agronomy and, later, other Andean root and tuber crops.

Equally important was Richard's belief that an international agricultural research centre should work in partnership with research programmes around the world rather than in isolation. Today such collaboration is taken for granted throughout the Consultative Group on Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system, but in the early 1970s this represented a bold departure from established practice.

Our relationship was not without its moments.

One of the most memorable occurred during an annual programme review in Lima in the late 1970s. I had travelled from Costa Rica, where I was leading CIP's regional programme for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Following presentations on true potato seed (TPS), I questioned whether the technology was yet appropriate for the small farmers with whom we worked.

Richard reacted immediately.

Turning round in his chair, he publicly challenged my criticism, and I responded with equal determination. The exchange became sufficiently heated for the Chairman of the Board of Trustees to suspend the meeting while tempers cooled.

Several colleagues quietly advised me that I had almost certainly destroyed my future at CIP.

They could not have been more mistaken.

Two days later Richard sought me out and apologised for the way he had reacted. He told me that I had every right to question the institute's research strategy.

That conversation taught me an enduring lesson about leadership. Truly confident leaders are not afraid to admit when they are wrong.

Far from damaging our relationship, the incident strengthened it.

In 1980 another turning point arrived.

A lectureship became available at the University of Birmingham, and I found myself torn between returning to the United Kingdom and remaining with CIP. My immediate boss, Ken Brown, advised me to discuss the matter with Richard before making any decision.

Richard's response has remained with me ever since.

He strongly encouraged me to apply for the university post while simultaneously offering me a new five-year contract should I not be appointed.

There could hardly have been a greater vote of confidence.

I accepted the lectureship and returned to Birmingham in 1981, but my connection with CIP continued through collaborative research and consultancy work. Whenever our paths crossed, Richard was invariably more interested in hearing about my family and career than in talking about himself.

That generosity towards younger colleagues was one of his defining characteristics.

Richard combined genuine compassion with an ability to make difficult decisions when circumstances demanded. He could be firm, occasionally stubborn, but he always acted in what he believed were the institute's best interests.

Today CIP stands among the world's foremost agricultural research centres. Many people contributed to that success, but Richard laid its foundations. His insistence that genetic resources should underpin potato improvement, and his vision of strong international partnerships, continue to shape CIP more than half a century later.

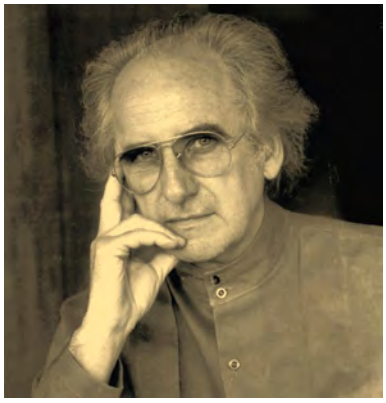
When I remember Richard today, I do not first remember the Director General.

I remember the man who took a chance on a young British graduate, welcomed him into an international scientific community, challenged him when necessary, encouraged him when it mattered most, and remained a valued friend throughout his life.

Few people have had such a profound influence on the direction of my career.

For that, and for his friendship, I shall always remain deeply grateful.

KLAUS LAMPE



Leadership is rarely simple. Some leaders inspire through warmth, others through vision, and some by demanding more of those around them than they thought possible. Klaus Lampe possessed elements of all three. During the years we worked together at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, I admired much of what he achieved, occasionally disagreed with some of his decisions, and ultimately came to appreciate the complexity of the man behind them.

With the passing of time, I have come to recognise that Klaus influenced my years at IRRI more profoundly than I appreciated at the time.

Klaus died in Germany on 6 February 2024 at the age of ninety-two. His passing brought back many memories—not simply of a Director General, but of someone whose leadership shaped both an institution and an important period of my own career.

Born in Freiburg in 1931, Klaus grew up in Nazi Germany. On one occasion he described to me the terrifying experience of escaping the firestorm that followed an Allied bombing raid. Those wartime experiences undoubtedly helped shape the resilience and determination that characterised his later life.

An agricultural engineer by training, Klaus worked in Afghanistan between 1965 and 1968 before returning to West Germany to occupy a succession of senior positions in agricultural development. In 1988 he became Director General of IRRI, succeeding the eminent Indian scientist Professor M. S. Swaminathan.

The institute he inherited was approaching its thirtieth anniversary.

Although internationally respected, IRRI was showing its age. Many of its buildings required major refurbishment, and its research structure no longer reflected the rapidly changing opportunities offered by biotechnology, molecular biology and other emerging disciplines. Klaus recognised that renewal could not be achieved simply by repairing buildings. The institute itself needed to think differently.

He introduced a matrix management system that fundamentally changed the way research was organised. Five interdisciplinary research programmes defined scientific priorities while the traditional disciplinary divisions provided staff and facilities. Not everyone welcomed the changes, but they transformed the way IRRI approached research.

Klaus also recruited a younger generation of scientists from around the world.

I was one of them.

In July 1991 I arrived at Los Baños to become Head of the newly created Genetic Resources Center, responsible for the International Rice Genebank, one of the world's largest collections of rice diversity.

Before accepting the appointment I had spent many hours discussing the future of the genebank with Klaus. During my interview we talked not simply about maintaining a collection but about transforming it into an internationally recognised centre of excellence for both conservation and research.

I made it clear that I regarded research as an essential part of the genebank's mission. Klaus listened carefully and, although that had not originally formed part of the position, encouraged me to pursue that vision once I arrived.

His support proved decisive.

Over the next few years we completely modernised the genebank. New facilities were constructed, including a purpose-built seed-drying room. Laboratory and storage areas were redesigned, staffing levels increased, and long-standing backlogs in seed processing were gradually eliminated. During an external review in the mid-1990s the genebank was described as “a model for others to emulate.”

None of that would have been possible without Klaus's backing.

I had however first met Klaus several years before joining IRRI.

While still at the University of Birmingham I attended a seminar in Wageningen in the Netherlands organised by my friend Jaap Hardon, head of the Dutch genebank. Klaus was one of the speakers (alongside the Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute.) I remember being struck not only by his thoughtful presentation but also by his unmistakable appearance. His long, flowing grey hair made him instantly recognisable.

Years later Walter "Wally" Falcon, then Chair of IRRI's Board of Trustees, told a story that perfectly captured first impressions of Klaus. Seeing him for the first time across a meeting room, Wally apparently thought to himself, "My God—they've appointed Beethoven!"

The comparison was irresistible.

Visitors to IRRI quickly discovered another side of Klaus. Together with his wife, Annemarie, he delighted in welcoming guests from around the world. Receptions at the Guest House became opportunities to



Klaus Lampe with Professor Walter Falcon (centre) of Stanford University at an IRRI Board of Trustees meeting, April 1991.

introduce visiting ministers, ambassadors, scientists and donors to the institute's work, and Klaus invariably spoke with warmth, enthusiasm and conviction about IRRI's mission.

One of my earliest responsibilities was showing Princess Sirindhorn of Thailand around the genebank. Klaus understood instinctively that such visits mattered—not simply as diplomatic occasions but as opportunities to demonstrate the importance of conserving rice diversity.



Klaus Lampe with HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand during her visit to IRRI, August 1991.

Yet Klaus was not always an easy man to work for.

He could be extraordinarily kind and supportive, but he could also be uncompromising and, on occasion, remarkably tough. A number of colleagues experienced the sharper edge of his leadership.

So did I.

By the time Klaus left IRRI in 1995 our relationship had become strained, and we parted on less than friendly terms. At the time I felt disappointed and, if I am honest, rather hurt.

Fifteen years passed before we met again.

In 2010 Klaus returned to Los Baños for IRRI's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. I cannot pretend that I was particularly looking forward to seeing him.

Then, during one reception, he quietly took me by the arm and led me away from the crowd.

Without hesitation he apologised.

He spoke candidly about the way he had treated me during his final years at IRRI and said simply that he had been wrong.

It was an unexpected and deeply generous gesture.

Very few senior leaders possess the confidence—or the humility—to apologise to a former colleague many years after the event.

Klaus did.

At that moment the disappointments of the past simply disappeared.

When I remember Klaus now, that is the memory that remains strongest.

His legacy to IRRI extends far beyond buildings, organisational charts or scientific programmes. He transformed an institute that was in danger of becoming comfortable, perhaps even irrelevant, into one that once again embraced change and innovation. The research directions he championed, the investment he made in infrastructure, and the younger generation of scientists he recruited helped prepare IRRI for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

For me, however, his greatest legacy was more personal.

He entrusted me with one of the world's most important crop genebanks and gave me the freedom to develop it into something far better than I had inherited. That confidence changed my own career.

Like all remarkable people, Klaus was a complex individual. He could inspire, frustrate, encourage and challenge, sometimes all within the same conversation. But perhaps that is true of many exceptional leaders.

When I remember Klaus Lampe today, I remember not the disagreements but the opportunities he created, the confidence he placed in me, the vision he brought to IRRI, and the grace he showed in seeking reconciliation.

It is a memory I shall always value.

Part II

Colleagues and Friends

If mentors help to shape the beginning of a career, colleagues and friends sustain it.

International agricultural research introduced me to remarkable people from many countries and cultures. Most were respected colleagues. Some became close friends. A few left a lasting impression not only through their scientific achievements but also through their generosity, wisdom, humour and humanity.

The five people in this section shared my professional journey rather than directing it. Jim Bryan taught me that good science must ultimately serve farmers. Ken Brown demonstrated that leadership is built on trust. Gene Terry exemplified integrity and fairness. John Sheehy showed the power of intellectual curiosity, while Eves Loresto reminded me that great institutions depend as much on dedicated professionals behind the scenes as on those whose names appear in scientific journals.

Together, they enriched not only my career but also my life.

JIM BRYAN



When I arrived in Lima, Perú, in January 1973 to join the International Potato Center (CIP) as Associate Taxonomist, everything was new—my surroundings, my colleagues and the challenges of working in international agricultural research. Within a few weeks I met Jim Bryan, recently returned from home leave in the United States after completing his contract with the USAID–North Carolina State University Potato Project in Perú. He had just joined CIP as Seed Production Specialist.

I could hardly have imagined then that he would become one of my closest friends and one of the colleagues who would influence my professional life so profoundly.

Our relationship did not begin entirely smoothly. Early on, Jim seemed to think it was part of his job to supervise my work—an assumption I firmly rejected and made very clear to him. Fortunately, that misunderstanding did not last. As I came to know Jim, and his wife Jeanne and their family, I discovered a man of immense generosity, practical wisdom and quiet kindness. Few people taught me more about potatoes, potato production and the realities of farming than Jim Bryan.

Jim was born in Gooding, Idaho, in March 1930. After serving in the Korean War, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural education before spending four years teaching vocational agriculture. He later joined the potato programme at the University of Idaho, and in 1966 Richard Sawyer recruited him as a Seed Specialist for the North Carolina State University project in Perú. Jim moved to Lima with Jeanne, their three daughters—Wendy, Julie and Mary—and their young son, Chris. I doubt that he imagined Perú would become home for the next three decades.

Like many expatriate scientists arriving in Perú, Jim spoke little Spanish. Despite years of determined effort, he never became truly fluent. His Spanish was perfectly adequate for everyday work, but whenever he found himself searching for a word he would simply smile, wave a hand dismissively and say, "Equis, equis, equis"—the Spanish name for the letter X—before moving on. It was his way of brushing aside the linguistic obstacle rather than allowing it to interrupt the conversation. Those of us who knew him well came to recognise the phrase immediately, and it became one of his endearing trademarks.

Jim's work took him throughout Latin America and far beyond. National potato programmes sought his advice because he combined deep technical knowledge with practical common sense. His recommendations were grounded in experience rather than theory, and he always looked for solutions that farmers could realistically adopt. He was happiest in the field, demonstrating techniques rather than merely describing them. Jim

believed that the best way to teach was by doing, and he never hesitated to roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty.



Jim Bryan planting potato leaf cuttings in the field in Costa Rica, 1989.

One of his most important achievements at CIP was establishing the centre's procedures for exporting potato germplasm safely around the world. Perú is the centre of origin of the potato and home to many diseases, particularly viruses, that could have had devastating consequences if inadvertently introduced elsewhere. Jim developed systems that protected both the valuable germplasm collections at CIP and the potato industries of the many countries receiving material. In recognition of his outstanding contribution to potato science, he was elected an Honorary Life Member of the Potato Association of America in 1991.

Our professional association continued after I moved to Costa Rica in 1976. Three years later Jim joined the regional programme I was coordinating, serving for a year as Seed Specialist with the newly established *Programa Regional Cooperativo de Papa* (PRECODEPA), funded by the Swiss Government.

One of our most rewarding collaborations was the development of rapid multiplication techniques using stem cuttings, leaf-bud cuttings and sprout cuttings. Under favourable conditions these methods made it possible to produce as much as a tonne of seed potatoes from a single tuber within a year. We developed the techniques in a screenhouse at Turrialba before transplanting the young plants to field sites on the slopes of Volcán Irazú. Jim also trained numerous staff from national potato programmes throughout the region,

and together we produced practical manuals and 35mm training slide sets that became widely used. Today those slides seem remarkably primitive compared with modern digital technologies, but at the time they represented an important advance in sharing practical knowledge.



Jim Bryan teaching agronomists from Costa Rica and Guatemala how to propagate potatoes from tuber cuttings in Turrialba, Costa Rica, 1980.

After retiring, Jim and Jeanne settled in Seattle to be close to their daughters, while Chris had made his home in Florida. Steph and I were fortunate to visit them on several occasions, and it was a pleasure to renew a friendship that had begun so many years earlier in Lima.

Away from his professional life, Jim was an enthusiastic stamp collector. He built an impressive collection of British stamps, together with another devoted to stamps depicting potatoes from around the world—a wonderfully appropriate hobby for someone whose professional life had revolved around a single crop.

Sadly, Jim's lifelong smoking eventually caught up with him. He developed emphysema and became dependent on oxygen. Yet even then he remained remarkably optimistic. The last letter I received from him, shortly after his eightieth birthday in 2010, was characteristically upbeat. One of his ambitions, he wrote, had been to reach eighty; every day thereafter would be a bonus.

Jim died in August 2010.

Whenever I remember those early years at CIP, Jim is never far from my thoughts. He taught me that good agricultural research begins not in laboratories or meeting rooms but in farmers' fields, where practical experience and scientific understanding come together. More than that, he showed by his own example that kindness, generosity and a willingness to share knowledge are qualities every scientist should aspire to. His friendship enriched my life for almost four decades, and I remember him with enduring affection and gratitude.

KEN BROWN



When Ken Brown arrived at the International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima in February 1976 as Coordinator of Regional Research and Training, Steph and I were living in CIP's guesthouse in La Molina. One morning, as we came down to breakfast, we discovered that the Browns—Ken, his wife Geraldine, and their five sons, Sean, James, Donal, and the twins Ronan and Aidan—had arrived during the night.

It was an introduction that marked the beginning of a friendship spanning almost fifty years.

Ken possessed one of the driest senses of humour of anyone I have ever known, and we took to one another immediately. Beneath that quiet wit lay a thoughtful, generous and immensely capable leader. Throughout the years we worked together he gave his staff considerable freedom, trusting them to exercise their own judgement rather than constantly looking over their shoulders. He managed with what I often thought of as a "loose rein": always available when advice was needed, but never inclined to micromanage. Watching him lead taught me as much about managing people as it did about managing research programmes.



New arrivals at the CIP Guesthouse, January 1976. Left to right: Geraldine Brown, Stephanie Jackson, Roger Cortbaoui (Lebanon) and his French wife, Josianne, and Ken Brown with one of the twins, Aidan, on his knee.

Originally trained as a plant physiologist, with particular expertise in cotton, Ken had worked extensively in Africa, and it was there that he met Geraldine. Immediately before joining CIP he had been based at Lyallpur—now Faisalabad—in Pakistan. A graduate of

the University of Reading, he was awarded his PhD in 1969 after Professor Hugh Bunting persuaded him to submit his published research for examination.

When Ken arrived at CIP, the Regional Research and Training Programme was headed by Richard "Dick" Wurster. Following Dick's departure in 1978, Ken became Programme Leader. Around the same time I assumed responsibility for CIP's regional programme covering Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. From then on we worked closely together, and I came to appreciate not only Ken's scientific judgement but also his remarkable ability to build productive relationships across countries, cultures and institutions.

One of the most significant developments during those years was the establishment of the regional consortium known as PRECODEPA, launched in Guatemala in 1978 with support from the Swiss Government. Looking back, it was one of the earliest examples within the CGIAR of international centres working collaboratively through a regional partnership rather than independently. Ken's diplomatic skills, patience and ability to bring people together were central to its success.

During the Browns' first months in Lima, while they searched for a permanent home, they remained in the guesthouse with us. Those weeks gave us ample opportunity to get to know one another. We also spent many hours travelling together to CIP's research stations, particularly San Ramón, and it was during those long journeys that our conversations ranged far beyond potatoes and agricultural research. We talked about management, science, family life, world affairs and almost everything in between. Those conversations shaped my own approach to leadership and remained with me throughout my career.



At the inaugural PRECODEPA meeting, Guatemala, April 1978. Left to right: Ken Brown, Mike Jackson, Richard Sawyer and John Niederhauser (CIP), Carlos Crisóstomo (ICTA, Guatemala), and an unnamed agronomist from Honduras.

Ken also knew how to enjoy life. One memory still makes me smile. Shortly after his arrival there was a birthday party at the home of CIP's Director General, Richard Sawyer. Richard's wife, Norma, had chosen an ancient Roman theme. Neither Ken nor I possessed anything remotely resembling Roman costume, but we improvised as best we could. The photograph shows the two of us apparently engaged in earnest conversation with Professor Norman Thompson, all dressed as rather unconvincing Romans. Whether we were discussing agricultural research or attempting to converse in Latin, I cannot now remember.



Veni, vidi, vici: Mike Jackson, Ken Brown and Norman Thompson strike a Roman pose.

Ken remained at CIP until his retirement in the early 1990s. Before leaving he wrote a short memoir, *Roots and Tubers Galore*, recounting the early years of CIP's Regional Research Programme. It reflected the qualities that had characterised his career: humour, generosity and a genuine appreciation of the people who had built the programme together. I was proud to have been one of them.

After retirement Ken and Geraldine settled in Devon. Following Geraldine's death, Ken later moved to Cheltenham and eventually to Salisbury to be nearer his family.

When I learned of Ken's death, I contacted his son Donal, whom I had come to know through our respective careers in international agricultural development. Donal told me that his father had "lived life to the full until the end", remaining mentally alert despite increasing physical frailty, and that his passing had been peaceful. I could think of no more fitting summary of a long and rewarding life.

Whenever I reflect on the research teams I later led, I recognise something of Ken's influence in the way I approached the task. He showed that effective leadership depends less on authority than on trust, encouragement and confidence in the people around you. He gave others the freedom to succeed while quietly providing support whenever it was needed. That is a rare gift in any manager.

For me, however, Ken will always be remembered not simply as an outstanding leader, but as a loyal friend whose wisdom, humour and generosity enriched my life for many years.

GENE TERRY



In early 1993, I was asked to undertake what proved to be one of the most sensitive assignments of my career. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) wanted an independent review of the future management of the *International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice* (INGER) in Africa. The work took me first to Nigeria and then to Côte d'Ivoire, where I was to meet Dr Eugene "Gene" Terry, then Director General of the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA).

At the time, I knew Gene by reputation rather than by personal acquaintance. By the end of the assignment, I had gained not only immense respect for him as a scientific leader but also the friendship of a man whose integrity, generosity and quiet confidence I would come to admire deeply.

Born in Sierra Leone in 1937, Gene trained as a plant pathologist, earning graduate degrees at McGill University and the University of Illinois. In 1987 he became the first Director General of WARDA, now AfricaRice, providing visionary leadership during a period of rapid growth and increasing international recognition. Under his direction the foundations were laid for the development of the *New Rice for Africa* (NERICA) varieties, achievements that transformed rice production across much of the continent. As one of the first African scientists to lead an international agricultural research centre, he also became an inspiration to a new generation of African researchers.

The review itself arose from a disagreement within the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) over where responsibility for coordinating INGER in Africa should reside. Historically, the network had been managed by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria, while WARDA believed that it was ready to assume that responsibility from its headquarters in Bouaké.

The issue had become politically sensitive. Strong opinions were held on all sides, and relations between the leadership of IRRI and WARDA were becoming strained. My task was straightforward in principle but far from simple in practice: to examine the evidence independently and recommend the most appropriate future arrangements.

The evening before I left for Africa, IRRI's Director General, Klaus Lampe, invited me to his house. As we discussed the assignment over a couple of whiskies, I realised there was one question I needed to ask.

"Do I write your report," I said, "or my own?"

Without hesitation he replied, "Write your own."

Those three words remained with me throughout the review.

After visiting IITA in Ibadan, I travelled to Bouaké. It was my first visit to Africa, and I was entering an unfamiliar scientific and political landscape. Gene welcomed me warmly. Although I represented IRRI, he never attempted to influence my judgement. Instead, he ensured that I had unrestricted access to staff, laboratories, field facilities and documentation. I was encouraged to ask whatever questions I wished and to reach my own conclusions.

That openness impressed me greatly.

Among the scientists at WARDA was rice breeder Monty Jones, whom I had first known at Birmingham. His pioneering work on NERICA rices was later recognised with a share of the World Food Prize in 2004, one of many examples of the scientific excellence that flourished under Gene Terry's leadership. Everywhere I looked I found evidence of a confident institute with capable scientists and a clear vision for the future.



Tree-planting ceremony at WARDA, Bouaké, February 1992, with WARDA Deputy Director Peter Matlon.

By the end of my visit, my conclusions had become inescapable. WARDA possessed both the scientific capacity and the organisational capability to coordinate INGER in Africa. Whatever expectations others may have had before my visit, I could not honestly recommend anything different.

Back at IRRI I wrote exactly the report I believed the evidence justified.

Not everyone welcomed my conclusions.

Some colleagues at IRRI were disappointed, and Klaus himself would have preferred a different outcome. Nevertheless, he had given me complete independence, and I felt professionally obliged to honour both the evidence and the trust he had placed in me.

Several months later, during CGIAR meetings in Washington, D.C., Gene greeted me with a broad smile.

"When you first arrived in WARDA," he admitted, "I wondered whether you had already written your report before leaving Los Baños."

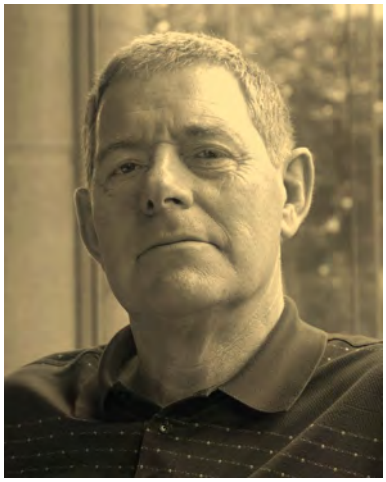
He paused before adding, "I was wrong."

Those simple words marked the beginning of a friendship that lasted for many years.

With the passage of time, I have come to realise that Gene taught me an important lesson about leadership. Confidence needs no embellishment. The strongest leaders are often those who listen carefully, trust others to reach their own conclusions and allow integrity to speak for itself. Gene did exactly that.

His contribution to African agriculture was immense, and history will rightly remember him for that. My own memories are rather different. I remember a thoughtful, generous and principled man who believed passionately in Africa's scientific future and who earned the respect of colleagues not by demanding it, but by deserving it. I remain grateful that what began as one of the most demanding assignments of my career developed into a friendship that I valued greatly.

JOHN SHEEHY



Some interviews remain in the memory long after all the others have faded. John Sheehy's was one of them.

In 1995 I chaired the Search Committee for a Systems Modeller at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). From the moment John began answering our questions, it was clear that he was no ordinary candidate. He combined the analytical mind of a physicist with the curiosity of a biologist, and he viewed familiar scientific problems from entirely unexpected angles. By the end of the interview there was little doubt that IRRI would benefit enormously from his appointment.

I could hardly have imagined then that he would become one of my closest friends at the institute and one of the most original scientists I have ever known.

John's route into plant science was anything but conventional. After graduating in Physics and completing a master's degree in Electronics, he turned to crop physiology, undertaking doctoral research under Professor John Cooper at the Welsh Plant Breeding Station in Aberystwyth. Before joining IRRI he had established an outstanding reputation at the Grassland Research Institute in Berkshire, where his work on crop physiology, nitrogen fixation and plant productivity had already attracted international attention.

What struck me most about John was not simply his intelligence, but his willingness to question accepted wisdom. He was never argumentative for its own sake. Instead, he possessed an insatiable curiosity and an ability to ask questions that others had overlooked. Many scientists solve existing problems; John was more interested in asking whether they were the right problems in the first place.

That approach soon became apparent at IRRI.

At the time, much of the Institute's effort was focused on developing what became known as the *New Plant Type* in rice. John supported that work, but increasingly he found himself asking a more fundamental question: if future gains in rice production were to be achieved, should we continue concentrating on plant architecture alone, or should we instead improve the efficiency of photosynthesis itself?

It was a bold question.

Rice relies on the relatively inefficient C_3 pathway of photosynthesis, whereas crops such as maize use the much more productive C_4 pathway. John believed that if some of the characteristics of C_4 photosynthesis could eventually be introduced into rice, the potential gains in productivity, water-use efficiency and nitrogen-use efficiency would be immense.

Many regarded the idea as impossibly ambitious.

John simply regarded it as a scientific challenge worth pursuing.

Through quiet determination and intellectual leadership he brought together an international consortium of scientists that eventually became the C_4 Rice Project. Supported in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, it remains one of the most ambitious collaborative research programmes ever undertaken in crop physiology. Although commercially successful C_4 rice has yet to become a reality, the advances made by the project have transformed our understanding of photosynthesis and continue to influence research worldwide.

John's scientific output was prodigious. He published widely in leading journals and became internationally recognised for combining rigorous quantitative analysis with remarkable biological insight. Characteristically, he also entered the debate surrounding the *System of Rice Intensification* (SRI), carefully examining its claims against what was biologically possible. Whether colleagues agreed with his conclusions or not, they respected the honesty and intellectual discipline with which he reached them.

Yet brilliant scientists are not always easy companions.

John was the exception.



Another enjoyable dinner chez Sheehy. Standing: Graham and Susan McLaren. Seated: Stephanie Jackson, Martin Mortimer and John Sheehy.

Away from the laboratory he possessed a wonderfully dry sense of humour and was an unfailingly generous host. Steph and I enjoyed many evenings with John, just as he was a frequent guest in our own home. He developed an enthusiasm for golf while living in the Philippines and spent many weekends on the course near Los Baños. Even after returning to the United Kingdom following his retirement in 2009, we remained in regular contact through emails, telephone calls and text messages that frequently revolved around rugby. Born in Wales of Irish ancestry, John delighted in supporting whichever team happened to be winning, and our exchanges during the Six Nations Championship were always full of good humour.

Among my happiest memories is joining family and friends in 2011 to celebrate John and his wife Gaynor's fortieth wedding anniversary. Six years later Steph and I spent a weekend with them at their home in Marlow, together with our mutual IRRI friends Graham and Sue McLaren. It also gave John and me the opportunity to compare our experiences of receiving the OBE in the 2012 New Year Honours. Having attended separate investitures at Buckingham Palace only a fortnight apart, we found ourselves reminiscing as much about the occasion as about the science that had first brought us together.



Comparing OBE notes, Marlow, July 2017.

John occasionally sought my advice on navigating the complexities of research management at IRRI, while I frequently turned to him whenever I wanted to explore a

difficult scientific question. Those conversations invariably left me with a fresh way of looking at the problem. That was one of John's greatest gifts.

John died in June 2024 after several years living with Parkinson's disease and Multiple System Atrophy.

The scientific community will rightly remember John Sheehy for his vision and originality. I remember him equally for his friendship, generosity and infectious curiosity. He showed that the greatest scientific advances often begin with the courage to ask a question that everyone else has overlooked. Few scientists possessed that gift to the same degree, and fewer still combined it with such warmth, modesty and good humour. His friendship was one of the great privileges of my years at IRRI.

EVES LORESTO



By the time I arrived at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in July 1991 to establish its new Genetic Resources Center (GRC), Genoveva "Eves" Loresto had already devoted almost thirty years to the institute. It did not take me long to appreciate that few people knew its collections, its people and its history better than she did.

Over the next nine years we worked closely together. During that time I came to depend upon her experience, sound judgement and unwavering professionalism. Although she rarely sought recognition, few people contributed more to the success of GRC than Eves.

She had joined IRRI in January 1963, less than three years after the institute was founded. Beginning as a Student Assistant in Plant Breeding, she progressed steadily through the ranks through ability, determination and an extraordinary capacity for hard work. For many years she worked closely with the distinguished rice breeder Dr T. T. Chang, contributing to studies on upland rice, drought tolerance and root development, and playing an important role in the development of the upland variety *Makiling*, released in 1990. Long before I arrived, she had earned the respect of colleagues throughout the institute for both her technical expertise and her generosity towards others.

When I joined IRRI, I had been given responsibility for establishing the newly created GRC and introducing significant organisational changes within the International Rice Genebank. It was an exciting challenge, but one that depended as much upon people as upon plans and organisational charts.

Very soon I realised that the success of those changes would depend upon the confidence and goodwill of experienced staff who understood the institute far better than I did.

Among them, Eves was indispensable.

During my first months I spent a great deal of time listening, observing and learning how the genebank operated. It became clear that a flatter management structure would improve both efficiency and accountability, with individual scientists assuming responsibility for major areas of the genebank's work.

Such changes inevitably altered long-established responsibilities.

I was conscious that someone with Eves' experience and standing might understandably view them with some reservation.

Instead, she embraced them wholeheartedly.

Recognising both her organisational ability and her remarkable understanding of our international partnerships, I invited her to take on a broader strategic role. Rather than managing one part of the genebank's daily operations, she became our principal liaison with national programmes and later Project Scientist and Assistant Coordinator of the Swiss-funded project *Safeguarding and Preservation of the Biodiversity of the Rice Genepool*.

In retrospect, asking Eves to take on that broader role was one of the best management decisions I made at IRRI.

Eves possessed a rare gift for working with people. Whether dealing with scientists, technicians, administrators or visitors from national agricultural research programmes, she earned their confidence through quiet competence, patience and genuine kindness. She never sought attention for herself. Instead, she concentrated on ensuring that others could do their jobs well.

Training became one of her greatest contributions. During her career she helped more than four hundred scientists from national agricultural research programmes develop their skills in collecting, conserving and using rice germplasm. Through the biodiversity project she travelled widely across Asia and Africa, conducting training courses in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines and Vietnam. Many of those scientists later assumed senior responsibilities in their own countries, extending the influence of her work far beyond IRRI.



Eves Loresto with participants in a rice conservation training course, Cambodia.

When Eves retired in 2000 after thirty-seven years of service, GRC lost not only one of its most experienced members but also one of its quiet leaders. I know that many of the changes we introduced during the 1990s—and the successful completion of the

biodiversity project—would have been immeasurably more difficult without her support, wisdom and complete professionalism.

Awards and honours recognised many aspects of Eves' distinguished career, but they tell only part of her story. Those of us privileged to work alongside her remember something even more important: her generosity, humility and complete commitment to helping others succeed.

Eves died in April 2012 after a long illness.

Whenever I think of my years at IRRI, Eves is one of the first people who comes to mind. She demonstrated that the success of a great scientific institution depends not only upon visionary leaders and distinguished researchers, but equally upon dedicated colleagues whose quiet professionalism enables everyone else to flourish. She never sought the limelight, yet her influence was felt throughout the institute and across many national programmes in Asia and Africa.

For me, however, her greatest legacy lies elsewhere. She was a trusted colleague, a valued friend and one of those rare people whose loyalty, kindness and generosity quietly enriched the lives of everyone fortunate enough to know her. No organisational chart could ever have measured the true value of her contribution. My years at IRRI would have been very different without her, and I remain deeply grateful that our paths crossed.

Afterword

When I began writing these portraits, my intention was simply to record memories before they faded. I soon discovered that memory has a remarkable way of bringing people back into the room.

As I wrote, I found myself hearing Joe's gentle encouragement, smiling again at Jack's quiet wisdom, recalling Trevor's infectious enthusiasm, Richard's confidence in younger colleagues and Klaus's unexpected generosity. Then came Jim's unmistakable "Equis, equis, equis", Ken's dry humour, Gene's integrity, John's restless scientific curiosity and Eves' unfailing kindness and professionalism. Although each has now gone, their personalities remain remarkably vivid.

Sorting through old photographs while preparing this collection strengthened that impression. Many recorded conferences, field visits or official occasions, but the images that mean most to me are the informal ones: colleagues talking over a meal after a long day, laughing together at a social gathering, or relaxing with family and friends. Those moments remind me that behind every scientific achievement were ordinary people who enjoyed one another's company and found satisfaction in working together.

When I first met Joe Smartt in 1968, I could never have imagined that the friendships described in these pages would shape the course of my professional life for more than half a century.

Each of these ten individuals entered my life at a different moment and under different circumstances. Joe encouraged me to look beyond my undergraduate studies. Jack introduced me to potatoes and plant genetic resources. Trevor taught me how to think more deeply about taxonomy and evolution. Richard gave me my first opportunity to work overseas, while Klaus entrusted me with responsibility for one of the world's most important crop genebanks.

Jim reminded me that science must ultimately serve farmers. Ken demonstrated that leadership begins with trust. Gene showed that integrity and fairness are the foundations of genuine leadership. John never stopped asking questions that others overlooked. Eves proved that the quiet professionalism of dedicated colleagues is every bit as important as scientific distinction.

Together, they influenced almost every stage of my career.

International agricultural research gave Steph and me opportunities we could scarcely have imagined when our journey began in Perú in 1973. It allowed us to live and work in several countries, to travel widely, and to form lasting friendships with colleagues from many cultures. For those experiences, and for the people who made them possible, I shall always remain deeply grateful.

These portraits are not intended to be definitive accounts of ten distinguished lives. They are simply one person's recollections of ten remarkable individuals whose lives became intertwined with his own. Others who knew them would undoubtedly tell different stories. I hope, however, that they would recognise the qualities I have tried to capture.

Science advances because each generation builds upon the work of those who came before. Institutions evolve, research priorities change and new discoveries replace old ones. Yet the influence of generous teachers, wise mentors, trusted colleagues and loyal friends endures far longer than any scientific programme or administrative structure.

When I look at the photographs that accompany these pages, I do not first see eminent scientists, distinguished administrators or respected colleagues.

I see ten people who helped shape my life.

This memoir is my way of remembering them.

As I reflect on these ten lives, I am struck by a common thread: each, in different ways, enriched the lives of others, opening doors, offering encouragement, sharing wisdom, and leaving behind a legacy measured as much in people as in publications.

And, above all, of saying thank you.

About the Author

Michael Jackson OBE is an agricultural scientist whose career in plant genetic resources and international agricultural research has spanned more than forty years.

Born in Congleton, Cheshire, in November 1948 and brought up in nearby North Staffordshire, he studied *Environmental Botany and Geography* at the University of Southampton, graduating with a BSc in 1970.

He subsequently completed MSc and PhD degrees in plant genetic resources and potato biosystematics, respectively at the University of Birmingham. Much of his doctoral research was undertaken in Perú while working at the International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima. He later became CIP's Regional Representative for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, based in Costa Rica.

In 1981 he returned to the United Kingdom to join the University of Birmingham as a Lecturer in Plant Biology, remaining there until 1991.

Joining the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, he served first as Head of the Genetic Resources Center, home to one of the world's largest rice genebanks, and later as Director for Program Planning and Communications. He retired from IRRI in 2010.

He and his wife, Steph, whom he first met while studying at the University of Birmingham, now live in North Tyneside, near Newcastle upon Tyne in the north-east of England. He continues to write on science, travel and the history of international agricultural research, drawing on a lifetime of professional and personal experience. They have two daughters, Hannah and Philippa, and four grandchildren.

This memoir is his tribute to the teachers, mentors, colleagues and friends whose wisdom, encouragement and friendship helped shape both his career and his life.



Mike and Steph Jackson at St. Mary's Lighthouse on the Northumberland coast in 2025