

Festschrift for John Long

Ann Blandford & Alistair Sutcliffe

Contrary to the understanding of a few people, and we won't name them, a Festschrift is not a memorial or an extended obituary, but a celebration of the life and work of someone while they are still around to enjoy the recognition. And John Long is definitely still alive and kicking (or should that be around and cycling?).

Over the past year or so, we have been editing a special issue of *Interacting with Computers* as a Festschrift for John Long. The special issue has just appeared (look out for it!). It contains five papers and, of course, a response from John, always keen to have the last word.

Two of the papers (from Jack Carroll and Alan Dix) focus on John's conception of HCI as a discipline and present the authors' viewpoints on where the discipline is heading. Jack argues that the sharp distinction between HCI as craft, science or design is unhelpful, and that a more integrated view (based around the task-artefact cycle) is more relevant to an age in which technology pervades all aspects of life and not just work. Alan Dix also argues that John's disciplinary conception was right for its time, but that as HCI has matured, and as the scope of contexts and concerns has broadened, the focus needs to shift towards design methodology.

The other three papers (from Becky Hill, Ian Salter and Peter Wild) are more recognisably in the methodological tradition that John established, applying the approach that John developed with various colleagues, and extending and adapting it to fit new demands across the domains of service-oriented systems, emergency management and (possibly surprisingly) economics.

Taken together, we hope that the five papers and John's response present a current snapshot of the character of John's work and the influence it continues to exert.

While we were preparing the Festschrift, some people offered less formal reminiscences of John, and tributes to him. These items are collected here. They are varied in their style and content – from short tributes, through somewhat grainy photographs, to an extended interview with Rachel Bedyk, whose tireless work organising and developing the Masters programme at UCL was as central to the success of that programme as John's visionary leadership was.

Rachel's account of the history of the Ergonomics Unit (EU) really sets the context for the current UCL Interaction Centre (UCLIC) and for much of the HCI activity in the UK and more widely. The influence of the programme is immense, if we consider how many researchers and practitioners have passed through the Masters or PhD programme in the EU, or have worked with John as researchers.

UCLIC, the successor to the EU, very clearly builds on the foundations established by John, though (to push the analogy) the building is a different shape and size from the one he left. This is true both literally and metaphorically. In a literal sense, UCLIC has moved from the suite of rooms in Bedford Way that were occupied by the Ergonomics Unit to modern, partly open plan, space colocated with Computer Science. Whereas the EU was entirely within Psychology, UCLIC is a research centre across Computer Science and Psychology & Language Sciences.

UCLIC is still taking a rigorous approach to understanding and practising the design and evaluation of interactive systems that are fit for purpose, whether that purpose be saving lives

or enjoying a game. The Masters programme is going from strength to strength, continuing to evolve to reflect developments in the subject and respond to new demands and opportunities.

John's legacy, both intellectual and material, is clearly standing the test of time.

Tributes

Dear John

In our shared domain you have led a generation of researchers and practitioners to think more deeply and carefully about what it means to design the interaction between humans and computers. For those who have followed, we have been lifted above our everyday concerns and given the means to face the troubles of theory and of ideas. Sometimes, of course, this can feel like a mixed blessing. But once on the path, none of us would choose to turn back.

For all this, my greatest thanks.

Wally Smith



In summing up and passing judgement on John's career in HCI, I could easily generate a list of several hundred positive memories, comments and analyses.

But I am simply not going to do that.

He would, of course, question the memories, deconstruct the comments, dispute the analyses and appeal any overall judgement.

That is precisely why it has been so cool to know him as a colleague, to count on him as a friend and to have had so much fun with him both at work and outside of it over the last 37 years.....

Phil Barnard

John with the 1983 MSc Ergonomics students after a morning down pit at the Cadley Hill mine near Burton on Trent. On such real world field trips – that were considered an essential part of the masters degree – John transformed from the prolix professor into being a bit of a lad, drinking pints, playing pool and joshing with the students. There was even an occasion when his verbosity came to an abrupt halt, as he watched incredulously when a miner removed one of my earrings in exchange for some of his chewing tobacco.

Yvonne Rogers



John Long is to be warmly congratulated, not only for his seminal contributions to the literature on cognitive ergonomics, but also for his determination to create educational opportunities in a field often regarded with suspicion by traditional university departments. He's also an extremely nice chap to meet personally and professionally.

Bob Spence