Obituary: Jon Oberlander

Aaron Quigley (University of St Andrews; aquigley@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Introduction

Professor Jon Oberlander (University of Edinburgh) passed away suddenly on the 19th of December 2017. Jon was remembered by friends, family and colleagues, at a deeply moving ceremony in the Playfair Library at the University of Edinburgh this January. Stories from his life as a friend and father attest to the deep impact Jon had on all those around him, and the lasting legacy he now leaves behind.

Jon was born in Edinburgh, to which he returned after his undergraduate studies in Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1983. He remained in the University of Edinburgh for his PhD studies and then as a postdoctoral fellow, research associate, lecturer, and reader, before finally being promoted to Professor in 2005. His Personal Chair in Epistemics speaks to his grounding in Philosophy and his life long interest in the philosophical theory of knowledge and its scientific study.

In Cognitive Science, Jon was well known and regarded for his work in linguistic representational systems. He described his work as "getting computers to talk (or write) like individual people". This resulted in research efforts to both understand how people express themselves, while also developing systems that might adapt to people. This view of the world resonated throughout his work with collaborators around Scotland and across the world in languages and social science, cultural heritage, psychology, linguistics and computer science.

Jon co-founded the Scottish Informatics and Computer Science Alliance (SICSA) in 2008 and served as its first director and later as its graduate academy director. Jon helped lay the foundations for the international excellence in University-led research, education, and knowledge exchange activity in Computer Science and Informatics in SICSA today. Jon was instrumental in driving SICSA forward in a time of great change in the University sec-

tor in Scotland. His resolve and good humour helped draw together this community of scholars in a spirt of cooperation and collaboration.

In the past few years Jon had academic responsibility for the development of the University of Edinburgh's new Bayes Centre for Data Science and Technology. In time, he became the assistant principal for Data Technology and the Director of the Bayes Centre.

Working with Jon first on the Smart Tourism and later Palimpsest: Literary Edinburgh projects was a great opportunity for me. His curiosity and creativity brought a sense of deep wonder and inspiration to our interdisciplinary team. He helped build bridges and acted to translate the aspirations and ideas of researchers from many fields of inquiry. These projects, and countless more, are all the better for having had a touch of Jon's intellectual energy, rigour and sense of fun.

"The most truly generous persons are those who give silently without hope of praise or reward", Carol Brink said. In my short time knowing Jon he exemplified this. He gave generously of his time, energy and ideas to all those who came to know him. Those who knew him for a long time spoke of his lifelong generosity of spirit and how he enjoyed reaching out to help lift others up. He often helped new people who had moved to Scotland and students in their careers and life.

Jon was a true renaissance man and proud Scot, who was equally happy in the countryside and cities of Scotland, his home. His sense of optimism and adventure has left a lasting impression on everyone who knew him.

His impact on academia in Scotland and beyond our borders will continue to be felt for many years to come. Jon's approach to understanding knowledge has contributed to the new Scottish Enlightenment we see today underpinned by Computing.

Spending time with Jon was always a great pleasure and we will remember him fondly.

Jon admired the work of The Woodland Trust, so donations in his memory are welcome. https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jon-oberlander

Professor Aaron Quigley is the Chair of Human Computer Interaction in the School of Computer Science at the University of St Andrews. He is co-founder of SACHI and is its current director. His appointment is part of SICSA, the Scottish Informatics and Computer Science Alliance. Aaron's research interests include surface and multi-display computing, body worn interaction, human computer interaction, pervasive and ubiquitous computing and information visualisation. He has published over 175 internationally peer-reviewed publications including edited volumes, journal papers, book chapters, conference and workshop papers and holds 3 patents. In SACHI he currently supervises four PhD students Iain Carson, Daniel Rough, Evan Brown, Guilherme Carneiro and Hui-Shyong Yeo along with acting as second supervisor for Max Nicosia in the University of Cambridge. Aaron is the ACM SIGCHI Vice President for Conferences and a Distinguished Speaker of the ACM.