

OBITUARY

Professor Sir Henry Harris (1925–2014)

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Professor Sir Henry Harris died peacefully at his home in Oxford on 31 October 2014, aged 89. He edited *Journal of Cell Science* with A.V. (Bill) Grimstone from 1969. In 1984, they were joined by a third editor, R.T. (Bob) Johnson. Professor Harris finally retired from the journal in 1992, the year I took over as Editor-in-Chief.

Henry Harris was born in Russia in 1925 and emigrated to Australia with his family in 1929. At university he initially read modern languages, but he subsequently studied medicine at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. In 1950, he moved to Professor Douglas Wright's Department of Physiology at the University of Melbourne. He was awarded an Australian National University Travelling Scholarship in 1952, enabling him to join the laboratory of Howard Florey at the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology in Oxford, UK, as a DPhil student. After a brief stay at the National Institutes of Health, in Bethesda, MD, USA, and three years as Head of the Department of Cell Biology at the John Innes Institute in Bayfordbury, Hertfordshire, UK, he returned to Oxford in 1964 to succeed Florey as Head of the Dunn School. In 1979, he was appointed Regius Professor of Medicine.

Henry Harris was a cell biologist who made important contributions to elucidating the nature of nuclear RNA and developed techniques for studying genome organisation. After reporting a new method for mapping genes in human chromosomes in *Nature* in 1975 with his student Stephen Goss, he went on to map several gene loci using somatic cell hybrids and published the results in *Journal of Cell Science* (Goss and Harris, 1977).

Henry Harris is best known for his pioneering work on the nature of cancer cells. In 1969, he reported in *Nature* that, when cancer cells are fused with normal cells in culture, their malignant properties are suppressed, thereby demonstrating the existence of tumour suppressor genes. Over the next few years, he published a series of papers in *Journal of Cell Science* in which he evaluated characteristics of cancer cells using the cell fusion assay.

Although he achieved great success in his research career, Henry Harris's interests extended well beyond science. He was a polymath, with a great interest in literature, languages and music. In 2008, he published an acclaimed translation of the treatise on cancer by Theodor Boveri, which was published as a supplement in *Journal of Cell Science* (Harris, 2008). He also published several influential books, including 'Cell Fusion' (Harris, 1970), based on his Dunham Lectures, and an autobiography 'The Balance of Improbabilities: A Scientific Life' (Harris, 1987). Last year, his papers were catalogued by the library at the Wellcome Collection (<http://wellcomelibrary.org/>).

As one of Henry Harris's DPhil students, I published my thesis papers in *Journal of Cell Science* (he had no time for the new commercial-style journals such as *Cell*, which was founded by Benjamin Lewin in 1974). These included my first research paper (Watt et al., 1978), in which, in collaboration with Mary Osborn and



Klaus Weber in Göttingen, Germany, we demonstrated that cancer cells can have an intact microtubule cytoskeleton. I remember vividly that we finished writing the first paper on a Friday and the following Monday he told me that the referees had no substantial criticisms, and so the paper was duly accepted for publication. On the one hand, this is the sort of route to publication that all of us dream of, but on the other, it ill-prepared me for the many extensive and negative reviews that my postdoctoral publications attracted!

I well remember that when I asked Professor Harris for advice about taking over as Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Cell Science*, he told me that it was just like shaving – he had a routine of going through the manuscripts each day. His practical, no-nonsense attitude to publishing high-quality cell biology research served the journal very well, and the same attitude is continued to the present day.

References

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