

John Heilbron's Memorial, March 20, 2025

By Diana Wear

There is much I could share about my two-score years with John—30 years at OHST and 10 postretirement. My initial 2,000 word-tribute could easily be whittled down by JLH, but I'll do my best to use my 750 words and focus on a few personal highlights.

While my job at OHST was administrative and managerial, it was the publishing aspect that I enjoyed the most—our journal, *HSPS*, later *HSNS*, the *Berkeley Papers in History of Science*, and, of course, John's many books. Watching a master scholar produce so prolifically was awe inspiring. *Yet, working with John was not always easy.* He was a perfectionist and could find minute errors at the final stages of publication. I used to say, "if I am not ready to push John off a high ledge, we are not ready to go to press." His exacting precision was hard at times, and yet it was expert tutelage from a master.

OHST was a place where people came from around the world to do their research and to work with John. John attracted and worked with countless visiting scholars and students and he directed international conferences, summer schools, and book projects. One of John's nearest and dearest was Dan Kevles, who I'm delighted to see here today. I remember Dan challenging me to a swim race and to my astonishment, he beat me. John assuaged my bruised ego when he recounted that when they had dinner that night, he had never seen Dan so tired. John sometimes showed a soft side.

Back at the office, John's deep dive into research was stirring. As he studied the history of science and math by the Jesuits, we had a running joke— John had been a Jesuit in a former life or that he would become one in his next life. Meanwhile in my life outside Cal, I was involved in social justice activism and John suggested I go to the Jesuit school for a Master of Divinity degree to learn more. I promptly enrolled.

During that time, John's first wife, Pat, died. It was a devastating time for John. Shortly after she died, John and I came into the office on Saturday afternoons, where we'd sit at the big table in 543 Stephens and he hand-wrote nearly 250 personal notes to share the

news. I sat across addressing and stamping envelopes. Afterward we would go for a walk around campus, often in silence. It was a tender time. Others in our small community also gathered around John. Though he was Vice Chancellor at the time, he would come to the office on Fridays for the noon hour; I would pick up sandwiches and drinks at Sandwiches A-Go-Go on Bancroft, and we'd sit around the table and work on a Friday *New York Times* crossword puzzle. I don't remember how many people joined us or how long we did it but those gatherings demonstrated a caring community.

John retired from Cal, but he and I still worked on the journal and books while he lived in England. He met and married the beautiful and charming Alison Browning who brought a new spring in his step and happiness we had not seen in a long time. I even visited their lovely home in Oxford. I pursued my studies, even while I was fiercely angry at the Catholic Church's position on women (that we're not "fit matter" for the likes of priesthood). By my last year I was nearly ready to leave it all behind. The cost of school also weighed heavily on me. To my shock, John and Alison paid the hefty sum of my tuition as a gift of "friendship and loyalty" as John said. Eventually my philosophy and theology parted company with the church but the education that John encouraged and supported was lifechanging.

Post retirement John, Alison, my husband Butler, and I would meet and dine when they came to Berkeley. Of course those visits often included work-related tasks at the Richmond Field Station. We packed up boxes of the Institutions project, the "green cards" from the Ted Feldman days, as well as his ancient telescopes and other instruments that would be shipped to Caltech. I was even going to shepherd a grant through the History Department near the time of John's untimely death.

John was one of the most significant people in my life. The communities he gathered, the scholarship he amassed, and the legacy he left enhanced my life like no other.