

*Giuliano Pancaldi
for a session to honor and remember John Heilbron,
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I first saw John Heilbron at work in late July 1985. Together with Roger Hahn, he was serving as an ambassador of US historians of science during the grand ceremony opening the 17th International Congress of the History of Science in Berkeley.

What convinced me, however, that I should spend my time in Berkeley as a Fulbright scholar the following year was a statement John had made as new editor of HSPS five years earlier. On that occasion he listed the challenges facing historians of science. The hardest challenge he mentioned intrigued me most. It was, in John's words, to make "plausible connections between the content of science and the character of society."

While in Berkeley, I found it comparatively easy to convince John that a school modelled on the physicists' summer schools could be good for attracting doctoral students worldwide to our discipline. The University of Bologna was ready to support the plan. John had a long-established connection with Tore Frängsmyr in Uppsala. So, our three universities joined in, followed later by Paris with Dominique Pestre. The itinerant International Summer School in History of Science was born.

The school met every second year for one or two weeks, with lectures in the mornings and informal discussions or archive and museum visits in the afternoons, followed by dinners where all the participants met again. Between 1988 and 2006, ten schools were held. Together they attracted more than three hundred students and young faculty from nineteen countries, including several young scholars from Russia who first joined the school in 1990.

We made every effort to ensure that during the schools scholars working on the social dimensions of science and those focusing on its content sat side by side. The "science wars" of the Nineties could make such an exercise difficult, and discussions did become very lively at times.

Indeed, during private conversations I perceived that John saw my desire to maintain an open dialogue between the two sides of the divide as misplaced, possibly dangerous for the cause of science. Overall, however, our schools upheld a spirit of pluralism. The same was true, I think, of John's *Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, to which I contributed.

Even now, as I work on the early history of biotechnologies, I regard it as an especially rewarding goal to try making “plausible connections between the content of science and the character of society.”

Two years ago, I suggested to John that we should have a new, thorough discussion on historiography. I expected the usual frank exchange of ideas. Unfortunately, there was not enough time for the exchange to develop as we had agreed.

I will miss John’s straightforward remarks on the most controversial issues of historiography.
