Walter F. Bodmer

Walter F. Bodmer was born in 1936 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His father was a German physician, an internist, and his mother was brought up in Switzerland. She was a teacher of modern dance. Being Jewish, the Bodmer family had to flee to England in 1938.

Walter Bodmer went to the Manchester Grammer School. He won a scholarship to Cambridge to study mathematics. He took his bachelor's degree at Cambridge in 1956. The accidental death by drowning of the famous statistician Wishart, under whom Bodmer would have done his Ph.D. in Statistics, led him to turn to R.A. Fisher, who was then Professor of Genetics at Cambridge, and who is recognized as the father of modern statistics, as well as a co-founder, with J.B.S. Haldane and Sewall Wright, of population genetics. Bodmer became Research Fellow of Clare College and demonstrator in the Genetics Department. He was the last Ph.D. student of R.A. Fisher. Publications written during his Cambridge years range from the purely statistical to others on theoretical genetics, which were pioneering works in this field.

Bodmer felt that he lacked formal training in modern biology. To rectify this he crossed the Atlantic to Stanford University in order to work with Joshua Lederberg, a leading molecular geneticist who had already won the Nobel Prize for his discoveries. Bodmer became Professor in the Department of Genetics in 1968. It was during this time that his work led to the mapping of genes to specific chromosomes and to the study of gene function, particularly as it relates to cancer.

At this time he also became interested in the genetical aspects of organ transplantation. It was Walter Bodmer, ably assisted by his scientist wife, Julia, who discovered many of these genes and who, by skilful analysis of laboratory data, unravelled the complexities of this genetic system, known as the HLA or major histocompatibility (MHC)

system.

In 1970, Walter Bodmer left Stanford to take up the post of Professor of Genetics at the University of Oxford. After nine years he moved to London as Director of Research of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) and from 1991 to 1996 as its Director-General. In 1996 he returned to Oxford to become Principal of Hertford College and Head of the ICRF Cancer and Immunogenetics laboratory at the world famous Oxford Institute of Molecular Medicine.

Walter and Julia Bodmer played a major role in helping international cooperation between scientists by organising regular international workshops. These meetings led to rapid progress in the field. Sir Walter's leadership in the Human Genome Organization (HUGO), of which he was President from 1990 to 1992, has facilitated international cooperation in human genome research.

He was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society in 1974 and was conferred knighthood in 1986. He is a foreign associate of the National Academy of Sciences and a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Sir Walter, who is the recipient of more than 20 honorary degrees and fellowships, is a past president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and of the Royal Statistical Society.

He is author of several hundred research papers and his books include *The Genetics of human Populations*; *Our Future Inheritance*; *Choice or Chance*; *Genetics Evolution and Man*; and *The Book of Man*.

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