

Professor John Hughes, Australia 1946-2006



In April 2006, over 500 people attended the funeral of John Hughes following his untimely death at home in Sydney at age 59.

John's academic career spanned 40 years, mainly at the University of Technology, Sydney. During this time he held almost every senior role in UTS, from Acting Vice Chancellor to Dean or Acting Dean of most Faculties. He was a pioneer in computing, an outstanding teacher and an early researcher in computer graphics. He was engaged to undertake reviews and various visiting academic roles at almost every university in Australia and New Zealand. At a memorial service at UTS in May 2006, attended by more than 400 people, John was awarded an honorary doctorate. A speech by an early former student re-visited John's inspiring and personal teaching approaches, describing him as like a friendly

big brother who followed students' careers for decades after they completed their courses; many of them now hold senior positions in the IT industry. The Australian Computer Society inaugurated a John Hughes Prize to be awarded to a student of computing at UTS, and the Vice Chancellor announced the establishment of a John Hughes Chair in Computing.

John joined the Australian Computer Society in 1968 and was an active contributor to its work for more than 30 years. This included chairing the ACS Publications Board, its Accreditation Committee and its Membership Board. He was made a Fellow and an Honorary Life Member of the Society.

As well as his active academic career, John was an early supporter of Computers in Education. He led the establishment of the Computer Education Group of New South Wales in 1982 and was founding President of the Group. He was a member of the National Council for Computers in Education in 1983 and Proceedings Editor for the 2nd Australian Computers in Education Conference, held in Sydney in 1984. This activity extended internationally through John's involvement with IFIP's TC3. He chaired the Organising Committee for the World Conference on Computers in Education in Sydney in 1990. An active member of Working Group 3.2 for many years, he recently became the Group's Chair. He had agreed to chair the International Programme Committee for WCCE2009 in Brazil; this conference will now be dedicated to John's memory.

John was gentle, wise, generous, unassuming, diplomatic, congenial, convivial, something of a gadget guy, and a true friend. He had a ready sense of humour, and was a great raconteur with several languages and a range of accents at his disposal. He enjoyed fine dining & wines. He had a wonderful way with children and young people: for many years he coached and refereed junior soccer teams.

John travelled extensively and was of course a life member of the QANTAS Club. We think of John as a “fellow traveller”; we often crossed paths with him unexpectedly in different parts of the world. It’s hard to believe that won’t happen any more. All his friends and colleagues will miss John’s travel tales -he could entertain us for hours with his stories. We were recently talking about plans for his forthcoming 60th birthday. He said that since his friends and ex-students were spread all around the world, it would not be fair to hold a party in Sydney and expect everyone to come, so he was planning to fly around the world having a series of parties wherever his friends were. That’s the kind of person John was. We will miss him.

Associate Professor Anne McDougall, TC3 member for Australia
Professor Sandra Wills, former TC3 member for Australia