

OBITUARY

Keith Jeffery

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Professor Keith Jeffery, our former colleague and Director of IT, has sadly passed away after a year-long battle with cancer.

It is with great fondness that we remember our colleague Keith who had a long and distinguished career with the Research Councils, working nationally and internationally for more than five decades on information systems.

People were often surprised that someone with such a deep knowledge of computing actually began his career studying geology and earth science at the University of Exeter. In his PhD in 1971, "Deformation Analysis in the Combe Martin, Ilfracombe Region, North Devon", Keith developed an early relational data management system, called G-EXEC, which he then developed further as a Group Leader for the British Geological Survey in London. This brought him into contact with Elizabeth Gill of the Atlas Computer Laboratory (which was established next to Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, then called the Rutherford High Energy Laboratory, in 1964). Together, they developed the idea of "The Geological Computer" – a vision for the support computers could offer to scientists which anticipated much of the way researchers work today. This led to further work as Group Leader at the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) based on the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory site.



In 1980, Keith joined Rutherford Appleton Laboratory as leader of the Information Management Group which had teams responsible for Scientific Databases and Decision Support Services providing a range of information systems using relational and free text databases to scientific communities such as World Data Centre for Solar Terrestrial Physics analysing data from the AMPTE (Active Magnetospheric Particle Tracer Explorer) satellite. Keith's responsibilities also included supporting the laboratory's Professional

Office System PROFS just as email and shared electronic calendars started to become an industry norm.

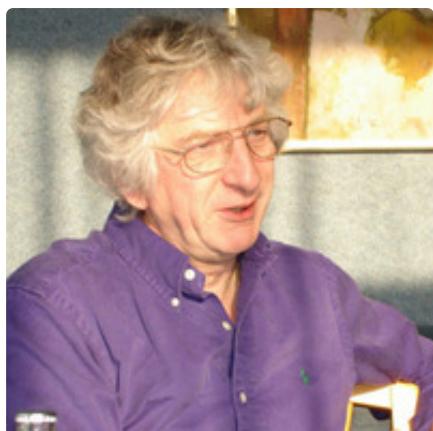
Keith's expertise in data management systems also led to him to become the UK representative on a European Community Research Group developing the Common European Research Information Format database standard (CERIF1991) followed by international projects such as IDEAS and EXIRPTS investigating the interoperation of research information.

In 1990, Keith's research interests led him to join the Informatics Department, first as Head of the Systems Engineering Division, and then, when the Information Technology Department was formed in 1999, as Director IT. Here, as well as leading a department of 140 people supporting the UK Scientific and Engineering R&D base, Keith led advanced research and development groups working on software engineering and data engineering. He championed one of the Laboratory's first web servers which was also one of the first outside CERN, and, in the early 1990s, the DataWeb project, one of the first web sites to integrate databases into web pages of contact details, project information and lists of publications.



Always enthusiastic about everything he was involved with, Keith's research interests in databases and scientific data systems led him into several standardisation activities in metadata, including Current Research Information Systems (CRIS) and the Common European Research Information Format (CERIF). His many international activities included leadership roles with the Boards of Very Large Data Bases and euroCRIS. Notably, Keith was president of the European Research Consortium for Informatics and Mathematics (ERCIM) from 2004 until 2012.

After retiring from STFC in 2013, Keith returned to NERC and was again employed by the British Geological Survey advising on the development of the technical architecture for the European Plate Observing System. He also contributed to several EU-funded projects including ENVRIplus and ENVRI FAIR. Keith retired from the British Geological Survey in 2025.



Keith was an active member of the Research Data Alliance (RDA) where his interests spanned: Metadata Standards, Scientific Knowledge Graphs, Data Provenance, FAIR data principles, Evaluation of Research, Complex Citations, Open Science Graphs and Virtual research Environments.

Keith was also a keen rock guitarist whose tributes to Mark Knopfler enlivened Departmental Christmas parties. He had a strong interest in archaeology, as colleagues who accompanied him to meetings in Crete will attest, and he was always keen to discuss the relationship between data, information and knowledge with reference to Greek philosophy, especially over a good meal and a glass of his favourite wine.

He enjoyed travelling, especially in Greece and Norway where his partner Anne is based. In recent years, Keith and Anne bought and renovated a house in Kalamata, Greece. He was able to make what turned out to be his final visit to his beloved Greek home late last year.