

Bridget Ogilvie

(1938–2026)

Parasitologist and visionary leader of life-sciences institutes and charities.

Bridget Ogilvie did pioneering work on how parasites evade their hosts' immune systems by altering protein expression in response to host antibodies. Her early research centred on infections with parasitic worms (helminths), including roundworms and tapeworms, which are a source of widespread and potentially fatal diseases.

She was an influential director of the Wellcome Trust – now known as Wellcome – a global charitable foundation in London and funder of science and health research. She was also instrumental in founding the Wellcome Sanger Institute, a world-renowned centre for genomics and data science in Hinxton, UK.

Ogilvie was passionate about communicating science and making its findings accessible. She was a founding member of Sense About Science, a London-based charity that champions the public interest concerning sound science and scientific evidence.

Her fascination with parasitology started at a young age. Growing up on a sheep farm in northern New South Wales, Australia, she became interested in the diseases that affected the livestock. She was educated by a talented teacher in a one-room bush school before going on to a girls' boarding school.

After initially choosing to study general science at university, she switched to rural science and completed her degree at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia, in 1960. She was the only woman in her year, in which she came top.

Ogilvie obtained a Commonwealth scholarship to do a PhD at the University of Cambridge, UK. Her thesis project was a study of the life cycle of the parasite *Nippostrongylus brasiliensis* and its interactions with its host's immune system. At the end of her PhD, she wanted to gain more experience in immunology and moved to the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in London, of which Peter Medawar was the director.

At the NIMR, Ogilvie developed close collaborations with immunologists Ita Askonas and Michael Parkhouse. However, she became restless, and, in 1979, accepted an opportunity offered by Peter Williams, then director of the Wellcome Trust, to do a sabbatical at the foundation, running the tropical-medicine funding schemes. This soon turned into a permanent position, and Ogilvie herself became director in 1991, serving until 1998.



She oversaw rapid expansion at the trust, which in 1995 acquired a large amount of funding from selling off the pharmaceutical company to which it was previously linked. This generous budget enabled Ogilvie to realize her vision. She recognized the importance of investing in centres and buildings, as well as funding individual projects.

In 1992, aided by funding from the UK Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust bought Hinxton Hall in Cambridgeshire and developed the Sanger Centre (now the Wellcome Sanger Institute) and Campus. The centre, headed initially by future Nobel laureate and biologist John Sulston, played a key part in the Human Genome Project – which completed the sequencing of the first entire human genome in 2003 – and ensured that genome-sequencing data remained publicly available and wouldn't be privatized. Hinxton's Wellcome Genome Campus also provided a home for the European Bioinformatics Institute.

Money from the trust enabled construction of a life-sciences hub in Dundee, UK, and many other life-sciences buildings at universities across the country. In 1998, Ogilvie was also central to persuading the government to match £300 million (US\$403 million) provided by the trust to set up a joint infrastructure fund to help UK universities to update and refurbish buildings, purchase equipment and develop shared facilities.

Such investments in people, through the development of career paths with innovative

funding schemes, have enriched the scientific workforce around the world. Ogilvie's initiatives fostered tropical-medicine units in Africa and southeast Asia that have been key to establishing research in low- and middle-income countries.

Ogilvie was always committed to younger scientists and, while at the trust, initiated funding streams for PhD studentships and early-career awards. She enjoyed her Friday afternoons as a visiting professor at Imperial College London, listening to and talking to graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Bridget's infectious enthusiasm and her involvement in outreach and public-engagement programmes and Sense About Science continued throughout her life. She was a wonderful mentor and many scientists turned to her for advice. She always managed to find time for them, despite her being extremely busy.

Bridget was a caring person with a great sense of fun and did not stand on ceremony. She was able to see a clear path through problems and always offered constructive advice to trainees, colleagues and friends. Her love of cricket, gardens and opera remained a constant thread.

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